Egyptian Myths: Meet the Gods, Goddesses, and

Jean Menzies

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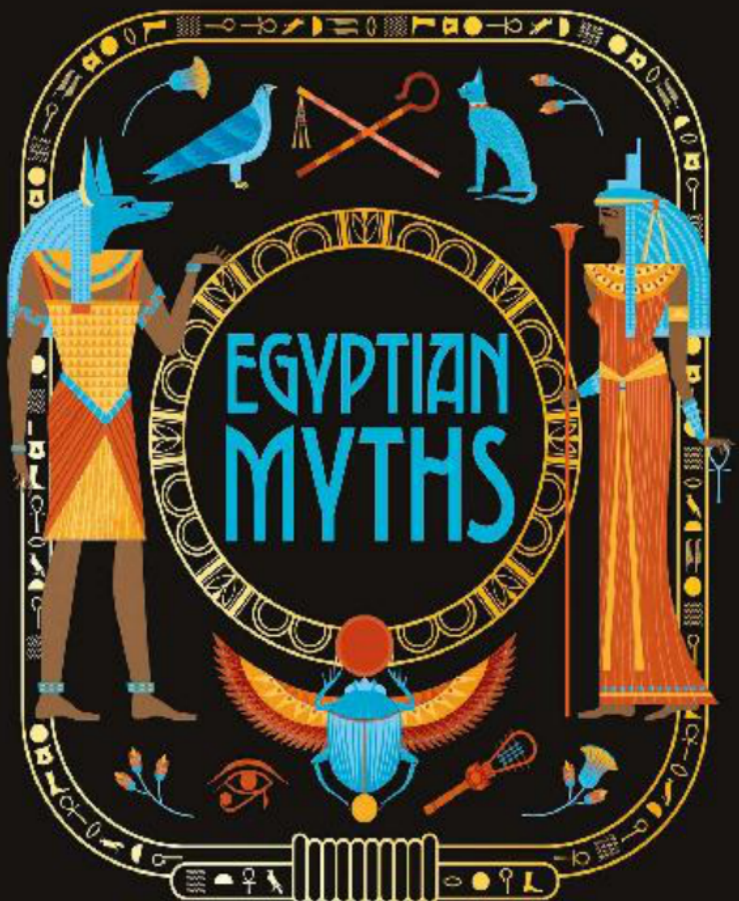
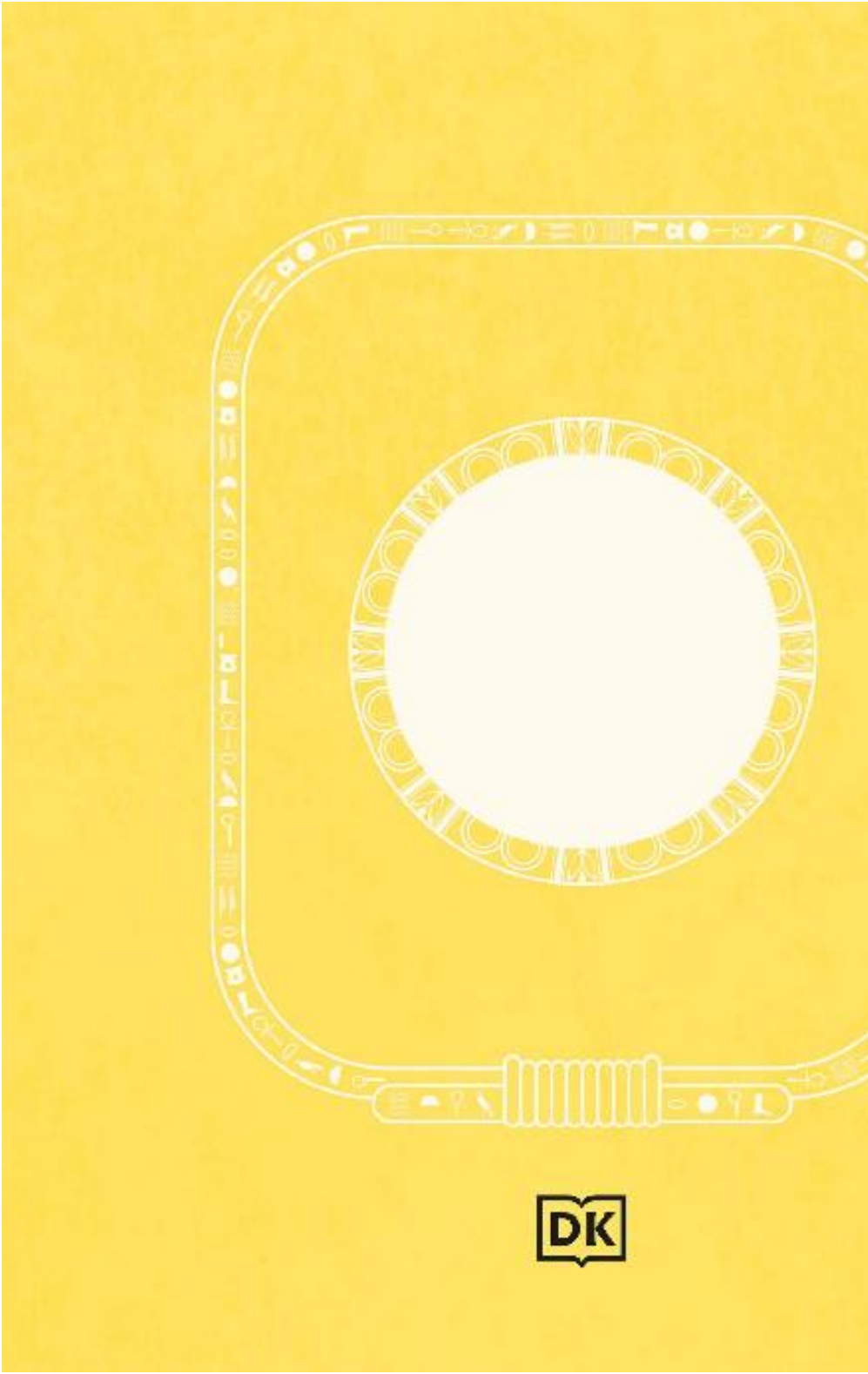


MEET THE GODS, GODDESSES, AND PHARAOHS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

WRITTEN BY JEAN MENZIES ☥ ILLUSTRATED BY KATIE PONDER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EGYPTIAN

MYTHS

WRITTEN BY JEAN MENZIES
ILLUSTRATED BY KATIE PONDER

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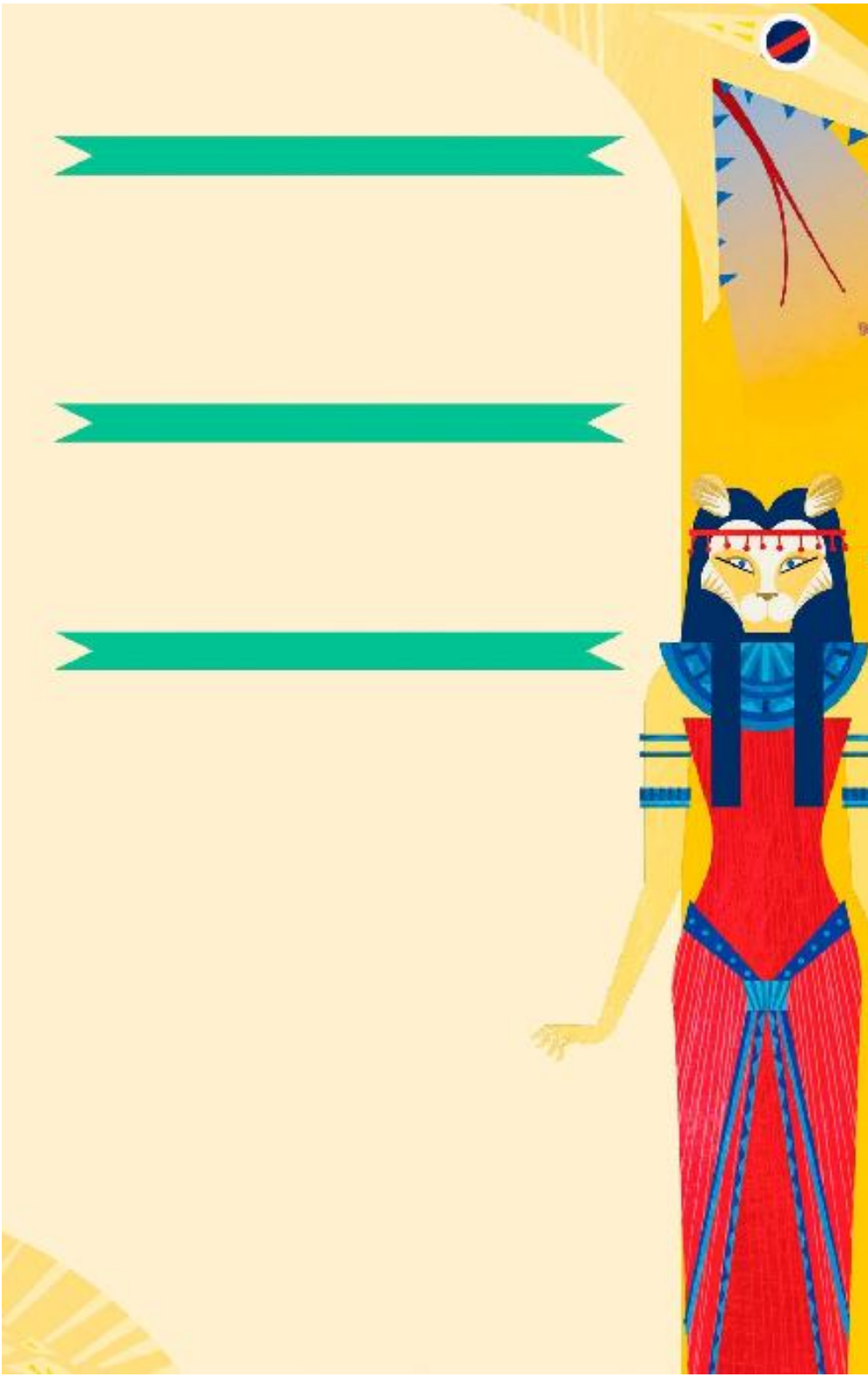

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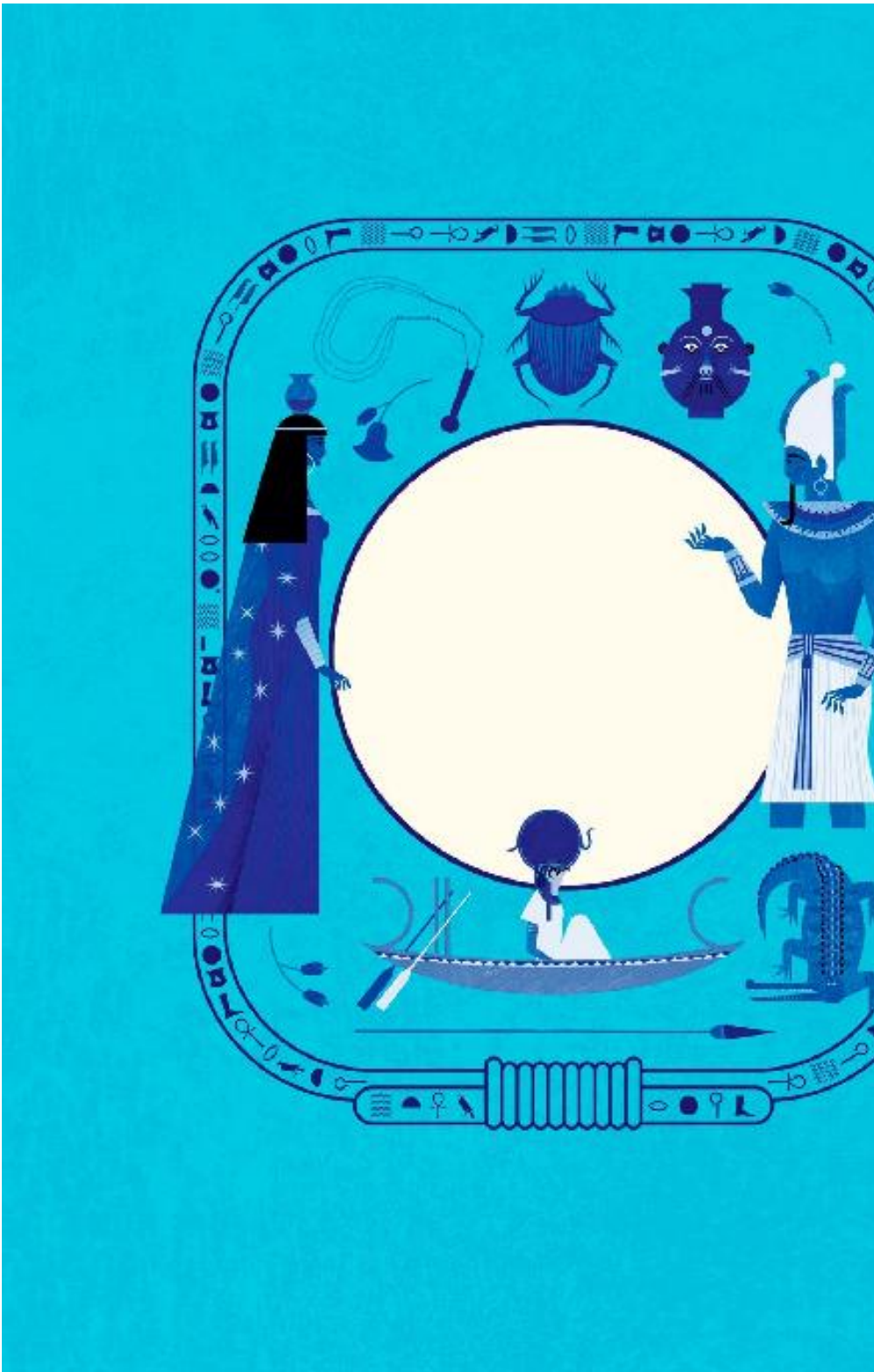

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Egypt was one of the earliest civilizations in the history of the world, dating all the way back to 3500 BCE. It was ruled by kings and queens called pharaohs, who the ancient Egyptians believed were representatives of the gods themselves. Perhaps it is not surprising then that religion—and religious myths—formed a very significant part of everyday life. The Egyptians' mythology, like their culture, was rich and diverse, and they worshipped hundreds of different gods and goddesses. Some of these deities we know more about than others. What stories we do know are some of the oldest myths that survive today, and they reveal a world of warring gods, miraculous magic, and the triumph of good over evil. Inside this book you can read some of the many versions of these tales, but remember there are still more out there.

JEAN MENZIES, AUTHOR

JEAN MENZIES, AUTHOR

ANCIENT EGYPT

The ancient Egyptians lived in the area in and around modern Egypt, in the north of Africa. Since more than 90 percent of Egypt is desert, the Egyptians mainly inhabited the land around the River Nile. Their civilization was ruled by a king or queen, called a pharaoh, from around 3100 BCE

until the last one died in 30 BCE

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The Pyramids were huge tombs built for pharaohs around 4,500 years ago. Many pharaohs were buried in tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

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RIVER NILE
Ancient Egypt
GIZA
HELIOPOLIS
Upper Egypt
Lower Egypt

VALLEY OF THE KINGS
MEMPHIS
THEBES
AMARNA
ASWAN

7

TWO LANDS

Ancient Egypt was divided into Lower Egypt in the north and Upper Egypt in the south. When they were united, the pharaoh wore a combined red-and-white crown to symbolize both.

There were people living in Egypt for thousands of years before it became one kingdom.

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Extent of ancient Egyptian empire around 1500 BCE

City

THE NILE

Every year, the banks of the Nile would flood. This moved river soil onto the land, making it fertile for growing crops. The Egyptians depended mainly on river boats to travel and trade goods.

RELIGION

The ancient Egyptians worshipped numerous gods, who they thought lived with them on Earth. The pharaohs were also considered gods and both had temples dedicated to them.

Key

THE BEGINNING

Without the changing seasons, weather, and fertile soil brought by the flooding of the River Nile, the ancient Egyptian civilization could never have existed. The Egyptians thought these changes in the natural world were controlled by gods and goddesses. The first myths are about the creation of the Earth, and how the Egyptian deities governed everything from the rising of the sun to the number of days in the year.

The Creation

At first, nothing and everything existed all at once. In every direction, the universe was filled only with the never-ending ocean called Nun.

There was no land or light, no people or plants, only black, swirling water. However, the potential for everything was hidden within Nun's depths. Silence reigned and nothing stirred for no one knows how long, until suddenly the tiniest of beings awoke. This was the god Atum, whose body slowly grew inside the ancient ocean.

When he was finally ready, Atum separated himself from Nun.

Atum emerged from Nun sitting atop a gigantic, pointed mound called the benben. This was the first land, and it allowed Atum to stand up. In this way, Atum set in motion the beginning of all things.

At first, Atum was content, amazed at his own existence. However, as he thought more and more, he also began to realize that he was lonely. His was the only mind that existed apart from Nun's, and Nun was quiet and mysterious. With whom could he pass his days?

There was of course only one other being Atum could ask. So he shared his concerns with Nun, who existed all around him. This was the first ever conversation the universe had known. “I float here all alone and feel nothing, Nun,” Atum said sadly. “Who am I to share my life with?”

“Your children exist inside you,” Nun answered. “Simply raise your hand to your nose and they will be born.”

So Atum did just that. He brought his hand to his nose and let loose a gigantic sneeze that echoed through the water. Looking down, he saw that his sneeze had released two beings.

One was Tefnut, goddess of moisture, whose body was human but whose head was that of a mighty lioness.

The other was Shu, god of air, who looked like a man and

The gods Shu and Tefnut shot out of Atum’s nos

e

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wore an ornate feather
in his headdress. Together,
they made up a bubble of
atmosphere inside Nun, balanced by
their different roles as wet and dry.

Atum was overwhelmed with happiness at the children he had created.

Tefnut and Shu depended on Atum to survive, but Atum wished to let them live independent lives. So, filled with love, he took both gods in his arms and hugged them tightly, sharing some of his own life force with them. This meant they could exist apart from him and be free. Now that the three gods existed separately from one another, time itself also began, in order to record the passage of their lives.

Nun, however, still held much more potential for life. Atum knew that light was needed for the gods to see, so he had placed a gigantic egg inside Nun. One day, the egg began to glow, and a loud crack rang out across the waters. The sun god Ra burst forth from the egg, shattering the shell into countless pieces that scattered far and wide.

Ra had the body of a man but the head of a magnificent falcon. Instead of a nose, he had a sharp beak, and his face was covered in lustrous feathers. Perched on his head sat a blazing sphere of light that shone more brightly than anything else in the universe. This orb was the sun. It was so precious that a venomous snake called a cobra had wrapped itself around the golden disk in order to protect it. The other gods marveled at the bright light it created.

Meanwhile, Shu and Tefnut had fallen in love and had children of their own. First they had a son named Geb, then a daughter named Nut. Not long after he was born, Geb, whose skin was green and decorated with patterns of plants and flowers, lay down in the atmosphere created by his parents and became the Earth.

When he stretched out, however, the waters of Nun threatened to drown him.

Quick-thinking Nut lay above her brother to protect them both. Inside her body, Nut held all of the stars in existence and she became the sky. From then on, every morning, she would help lift the god Ra over Geb so that the sun could rise each day above the lands of Egypt.

Atum's Eye

One day, Shu and Tefnut went for a walk through Nun, but as they talked they did not realize how far they had wandered. Soon they were hopelessly lost.

Shu and Tefnut looked around, but they couldn't see any of the other gods. In fact, all they could see was the dark abyss of the endless ocean, and were unable to find their way back home. When Atum could not find his children, he was distraught. He cried out to the universe, "Shu? Tefnut? Where are you?"

It was his eye that offered a solution.

"Let me leave your body for a little while and go out into the depths of Nun to look for them," his eye said. "I can see farther than anyone else and can search more quickly by myself. Then, when I return, we can be reunited."

Atum eagerly agreed to his eye's suggestion. With an echoing "Plop!" he removed it from its socket and gave it a life of its own, as only a god can do.

17
Atum removed his eye and gave it life.

For many days and nights, the eye of Atum searched for the god's children, but they were nowhere to be seen. Atum had almost given up hope of them ever being found when his eye discovered them by chance, lost within Nun's depths, unable to tell left from right.

The two gods were overjoyed at the eye's arrival.

The eye could see through the darkness far better than Shu and Tefnut, so the pair followed closely behind, careful not to lose sight of it as it led them home.

When all three returned, Atum was delighted. The eye, however, was horrified. There in the socket where it had once dwelled, was a gleaming new eye that had grown in its place. Filled with grief, it began to cry a flood of tears that rained down on the earth. The gods were amazed to see that where each tear fell, a small figure sprang up. Soon a crowd of

them huddled together on the ground. These were the first humans.

Atum had not meant to replace his first eye, but as a god his body was quick to heal, and he could not banish the new eye. Instead, he placed his old eye on his forehead, asking it to watch over the humans it had created. Although the appearance of the humans had been an accident, Atum felt it was his duty to take care of them because he was the cause of their existence.

Atum decided to give humankind four gifts.

Atum's first gift was the four winds that gave humans the breath of life. The second was the River Nile, which provided fertile land to grow crops. The third gift was to make all humans equal, so no one person was more important than another. For his last gift, Atum gave the humans knowledge of the underworld, so they knew they could spend their afterlives with the gods themselves.

SHU

GOD OF THE AIR

Shu was the god of air and wind. In particular, he represented air's dry aspect, which, when combined with Tefnut's moisture, created the Earth's atmosphere. He was usually shown as a man with an ostrich feather in his hair.

CLOUDS
The ancient Egyptians sometimes called the clouds "Shu's bones."

LION
Occasionally Shu would be shown as a lion, similar to his sister Tefnut's lioness form.

OSTRICH FEATHER
This was the hieroglyphic symbol for Shu. Its lightness symbolized the air.

MIST
Pharaohs were described as purifying themselves in "the lakes of Shu," which may have referred to mist.

PARENTS

: Atum

CHILDREN

: Geb and Nut

SACRED SYMBOLS

HOLDING UP THE SKY
In ancient Egyptian myth, Shu used his own body to hold up Nut, the sky, above Geb, the Earth. In this way, he was similar to the giant Atlas of ancient Greek myth, who held the sky in place on his shoulders.

GOD

TEFNUT

GODDESS OF MOISTURE

Tefnut was the goddess of moisture. She provided the wetness to complement Shu's dryness in the creation of the atmosphere. Usually she was portrayed with the body of a woman and the head of a mighty lioness.

DJAM SCEPTER
Sometimes Tefnut was shown carrying the djam scepter. It was similar to a was scepter, but curved.

SPIT
Tefnut's name is linked to the Egyptian word "tefen," meaning to spit.

CROPS
As water goddess, Tefnut made crops grow and she was sometimes shown wearing them in a crown.

LIONESS
Sometimes Tefnut would take on the whole shape of a lioness rather than just having a lion's head.

PARENTS

: Atum

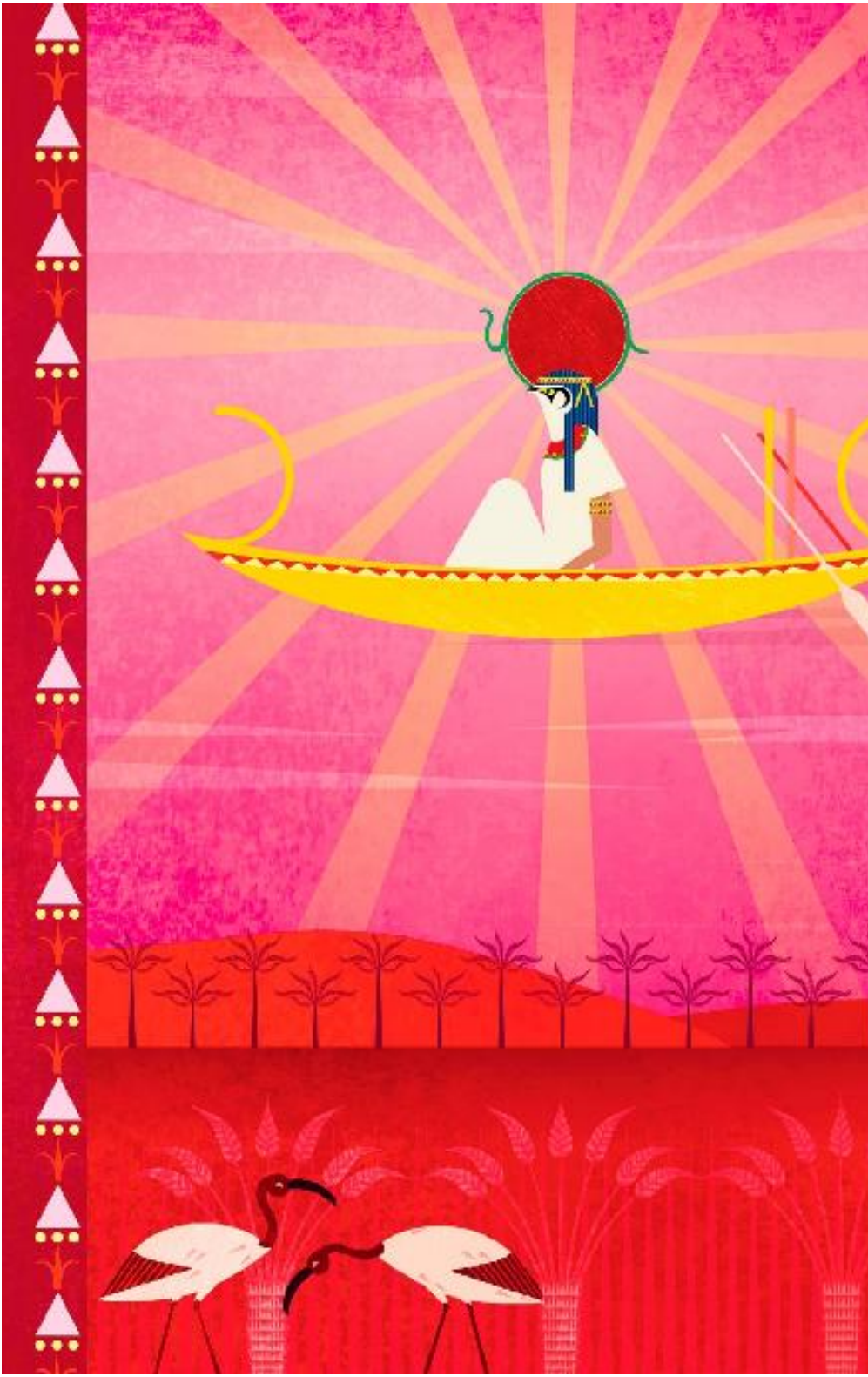
CHILDREN

: Geb and Nut

SACRED SYMBOLS

HIGH PRIESTESS
When Arsinoë ruled Egypt as pharaoh alongside her brother Ptolemy, she also took on the role of high priestess. As high priestess, she was often referred to as an embodiment of the goddess Tefnut.

GODDESS



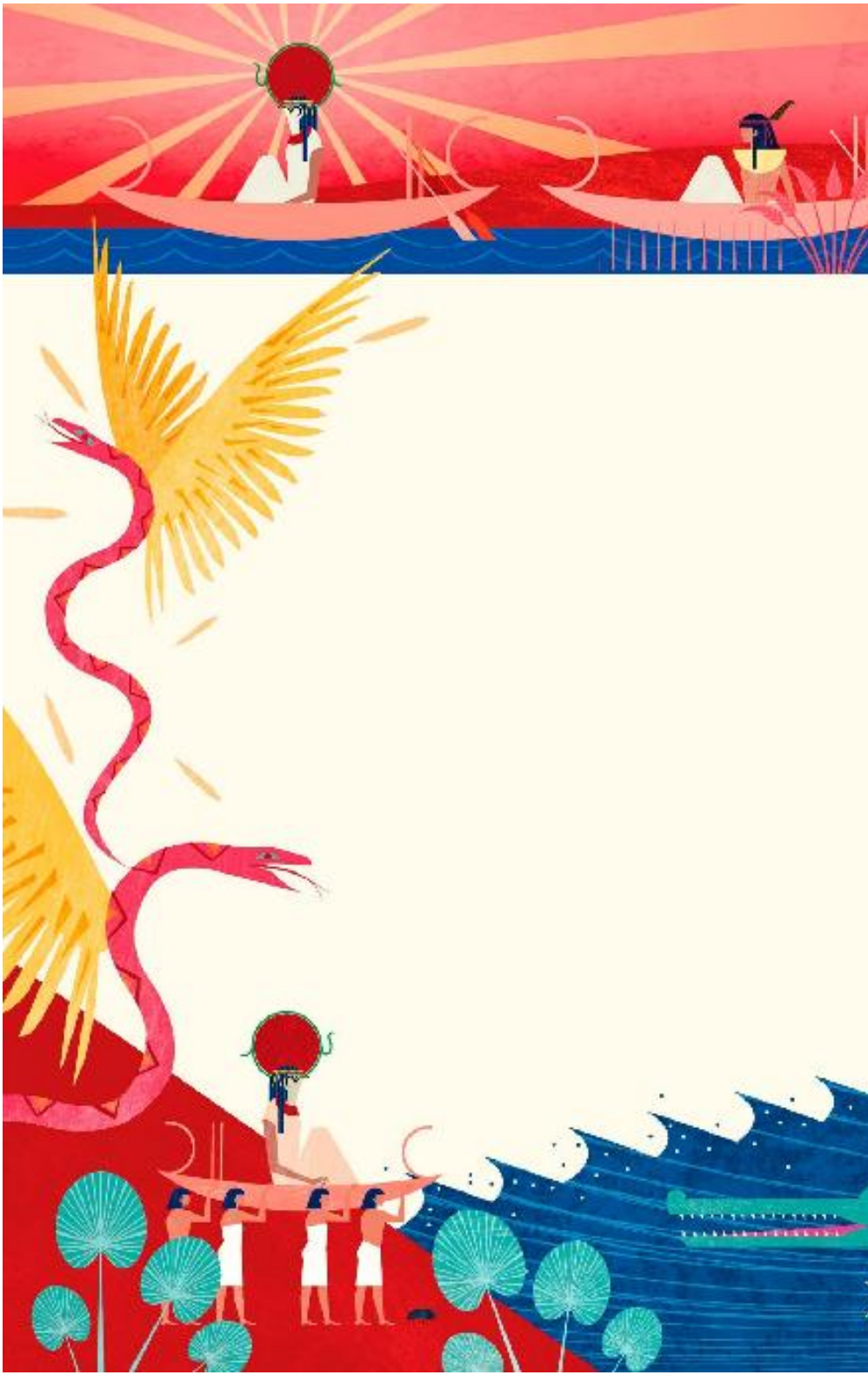
Day and Night

Each morning, Ra stepped onto his boat and set sail over Nut, climbing high into the sky and down again. He brought with him the sun, to light up the ground below.

During the day, Ra's journey was peaceful. He glided above the land, watching the shadows cast by his light become longer and shorter. It was in the evening, when it was time for the sun to set, that things grew more perilous, though. Every night, Ra knew he would have to travel through the underworld, Duat, where humans were sent after they passed away. However, it was not only the souls of the dead that resided there.

Duat was home to a great number of strange and terrifying creatures.

As sunset approached, Ra steered his boat below the horizon at its most westerly point, taking the sun with him so that the world above was plunged into darkness. Then he disembarked by the entrance to Duat and prepared himself for the challenges ahead. Upon his arrival, Ra was greeted by a troop of baboons who sang and danced with excitement at his return.



In Duat, Ra boarded a second boat and set off into the calm waters of the River Wernes. There, other gods and goddesses joined him in small vessels of their own. Ra still carried the disk of the sun, and as its golden rays fell on the ground, lush fields sprang up along the previously bare riverbanks. However, as they traveled, the river became narrower, and Ra knew they were approaching the land of Rosetau.

Eventually, the Wernes dried up completely, and Ra could no longer sail his boat.

As they entered Rosetau, Ra had to enlist the help of several men and women to carry his boat along a narrow path guarded by winged snakes. At the head of their procession, an enormous beetle joined them to guide Ra over the sandy land. Eventually, Ra reached the deepest point of Duat, where water covered the ground once again, and he was greeted by Nun in the form of a crocodile. It was the power of Nun that renewed Ra each night, giving him the energy

to carry on his journey and make the sun rise again the next day. And how he needed it! Ra and his companions were about to meet their greatest obstacle. As they sailed on, a great hissing sound surrounded them.

Suddenly, Ra found his path blocked by the evil serpent Apophis.

When Ra drew near, Apophis slithered toward him and opened its enormous jaws—so wide that the water Ra was sailing on flowed straight into its belly. Ra had to use all his might to paddle against the current pulling him into the snake's mouth. Thankfully, Ra was filled with the power of Nun. He used his divine strength to push back the monstrous beast and escaped its snapping jaws. With Apophis defeated, Ra was safe. After twelve long hours, he had reached the other side of Duat, and the land of the living. There, he boarded his daytime boat once more and a new day began.

The Curse of Geb and Nut

Shu and Tefnut were very happy with the way things were. The sun rose each day over the Earth, lush crops grew by the Nile, and stars twinkled at night.

To make sure that nothing changed, Shu and Tefnut decided that Geb and Nut should have no offspring of their own. Shu stood between Geb and Nut to keep them apart, lifting Nut high up, and as a result created the atmosphere between the ground and sky.

Geb and Nut were madly in love, however, and did not care what the older gods wanted. So the two younger deities snuck away and met in secret.

But not long after Geb and Nut had been reunited, they were discovered!

The god Ra accidentally walked into their secret hiding spot, and he was furious. He brought down a curse upon them. “You have disobeyed the gods!” he bellowed. “As punishment, neither of you will ever have a child of your own during any of the three hundred and sixty days of the year.”

Shu separated Geb and Nut, creating the atmosph

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Now Ra, too, had a son, the god Thoth. Thoth had no mother, since he had been born from the lips of his father alone. He had the body of a man but the head of a majestic bird, known as an ibis, with a long, curved beak. He was also particularly clever.

Thoth thought it was unfair that Geb and Nut couldn't be together.

So the god decided to see if he could do anything to help them. His cunning mind took note of the exact words that his father had spoken, and realized there may be a loophole in his curse. Ra had said that Geb and Nut should not have any children on the three hundred and sixty days that currently existed in the year, but he had said nothing about any additional days that might come into being. Thoth realized that if Geb and Nut wanted to have their own children, more days must be added to the year for them to do so. For all of Thoth's wisdom, however, it would not be a simple task.

There was only one being in addition to Ra who could decide on the number of

days in existence, and that was Khonsu, god of the moon. Like the sun that Ra carried, Khonsu held the shining disk of the moon on his head, and traveled across the skies while Ra made his journey through the underworld each night.

Thoth, therefore, went to Khonsu to request his assistance.

"Khonsu, have you heard that Ra has cursed Geb and Nut to have no children during the year?" Thoth asked. "For the love they share, will you add days to the year to help them?"

"If you can prove that this is a wise decision, then I will help you," Khonsu replied. "Why don't we play a game of senet to decide?"

Senet was an Egyptian board game similar to backgammon and greatly popular among the gods. "If you win," Khonsu said, "I will give you five more days to add to the year."
"And what if I lose?" asked Thoth, suspiciously.
Khonsu knew of Thoth's wisdom and had prepared his request already. "If I win," he said, "you must share with me all the knowledge of what happens in those shadowy corners of the universe I cannot see with my own dim light."

Thoth agreed to Khonsu's terms and so their deal was struck.

A senet board was set up, and the two gods proceeded to play for many hours. Both were greatly skilled in the game. So impressive was their match, the other gods gathered around to watch them play, exchanging guesses as to who might win.
It was not until the very final move that the winner became clear. It was Thoth, whose cleverness was unparalleled, who claimed the victory. As promised, Khonsu added five extra days to the year, making

three hundred and sixty-five in total. In the extra days, Geb and Nut were free of Ra's curse and could meet again.

On each of the extra days, Geb and Nut had a child.

On the first day, their son Osiris was born, and the new parents were filled with joy. On the next day, their second son Horus the Elder arrived. After him, came a third son, Set. In the next two days, Nut gave birth to two daughters, whom they named Isis and Nephthys in turn. Geb and Nut were delighted. Little did they know that one of their children was destined to betray the others.

GEB

GOD OF THE EARTH

Geb had green skin, and various plants and flowers grew from his body. In fact, he was responsible for many of the fruits and vegetables the Egyptians depended on. He was also the leader of the group that settled disputes between the gods.

GOOSE
The goose was used as the hieroglyph for Geb's name and was usually shown on his head.

SNAKES
Geb was the father of snakes and sometimes appeared with a snake's head.

BARLEY
This important grain was believed to grow from Geb's ribs themselves.

EARTHQUAKES
The ancient Egyptians believed that earthquakes were the result of Geb's laughter.

PARENTS
: Shu and Tefnut

CHILDREN
: Horus the Elder, Isis, Nephthys, Osiris, and Set

SACRED SYMBOLS

HILLS AND VALLEYS
When Geb lay down beneath Nut, the sky, he became the Earth on which animals and humans would eventually live. The curves and dips of his body, therefore, formed Earth's hills and valleys.

GOD

NUT

GODDESS OF THE SKY

Nut was the goddess of the sky. She was often depicted as a human, but she contained all the stars in the universe. She was also shown in Egyptian art as a giant cosmic cow that carried the god Ra on its back.

LADDER
In some myths, pharaohs could ascend into the sky after death using a sacred ladder.

STARS
Nut contained every star in the sky and they are usually shown covering her skin.

WATER POT
Nut was always identifiable by the water pot she carried on her head.

SKY
Nut is often shown in Egyptian art arched over the god Geb, the Earth, to form the sky.

PARENTS
: Shu and Tefnut

CHILDREN
: Horus the Elder, Isis, Nephthys, Osiris, and Set

SACRED SYMBOLS

COFFIN PAINTINGS
Images of Nut were frequently painted on the inside of coffins, especially those of the pharaohs, or carved onto stone coffins called sarcophaguses. Sometimes she was painted as large as the body inside.

GODDESS

THE GODS

The ancient Egyptians thought that the gods were part of their history, and had ruled as the kings and queens of Egypt for ten thousand years before humans took over. They believed that during this time, the gods watched over the world and tried to maintain peace among humankind.

It wasn't always easy, however, and fights inevitably broke out between rival gods and mortals alike. These are the tales of the years when the Earth was ruled by the gods, starting with the first king of all, Ra.

With the world created, the gods decided to appoint Ra as the first king of Egypt. He was perfectly placed to watch over the Earth as he sailed across the sky each day.

As king, Ra was incredibly powerful. He was also skilled in magic, and could transform into different shapes at will to watch over the people of Egypt, and the other gods. Every time he changed form, he took a different name. One moment he was Ra, the falcon-headed god who sailed his boat through the sky, and the next he became Khepri, a giant scarab beetle whose smooth, dark shell shone with the light of the sun.

However, Ra also had a secret name that he shared with no one else, not even the other gods.

This was Ra's true name. To know a god's true name was to have control over them, so he hid his carefully and only let the other gods call him Ra. All of the gods had their own true name, just like Ra, and they all guarded them from each other to protect their power.

The goddess Isis, daughter of Geb and Nut, was the wisest of all the gods after Thoth, and she prided herself on knowing everything there was to know about the universe. Ra's true name, however, was the only thing that remained a secret to her.

Isis was determined to find out Ra's true name by any means possible.

As Ra had gotten older, his mouth had grown slacker and when he was tired, he occasionally found himself drooling onto the ground. One evening, Isis waited for Ra to pass by in his boat and she slyly gathered the spittle he left behind. Isis was also a great expert in magic, and she used a spell to form the saliva into a venomous snake, which she left in the middle of the road that Ra traveled down each day. Later, Ra was walking past the spot where

the snake was lying with some friends. He didn't notice the serpent coiled at his feet until it lunged at him, sinking its jagged teeth into his flesh. Ra yelled out in pain.

"I have been bitten!" he exclaimed, turning to his companions.

Ra's whole body then began to shiver and shake as the snake's poison spread through his veins. "Send for the rest of the gods, for surely one of them will know a way to save me from this venom," Ra cried, and his friends ran off in search of help.

Ra returned to his chambers unsteadily and waited for his family to arrive. He did not have to wait long, for the other gods came rushing when they heard the news, looks of shock on their faces at the sight of the mighty god so ill. The only one who was not surprised, of course, was Isis, who stood next to them all, copying their expressions, and pretending not to know what had happened.

"What has befallen you, noble one?" Isis asked.

"I was out walking the Earth and did not notice that a snake was lying in wait on the road," Ra explained. "It struck my leg with its fangs and poisoned me. Now my whole body is icy cold and fiery hot all at once. You are an expert in magic, Isis, is there not something you can do to heal me of this sickness?"
Isis pretended to think about it for a few minutes before making her suggestion: "If you were to speak your true name out loud, with me as your witness, your strength may be restored, for a true name contains life itself."

For the first time, Ra grew suspicious. He knew how much power there was in a true name.

Ra did not want to share his name if he did not have to, so he replied, "My name is Ra, who sails the sun across the sky each day. But some call me Khepri when I appear as a gigantic beetle."
Isis gritted her teeth, perfectly aware that neither of these were the name she sought. "Neither of those are your true name," she replied, crossing her arms.
There was nothing else Ra could do. The venom continued to rage through his system and, trick or not, this was the only way he could be cured. So he lowered his head to Isis's ear and whispered his true name so that only she could hear it.

A wide smile spread across Isis's face when she learned the final piece of knowledge she lacked, and she raised her arms high above her head to chant. "Venom, you have heard the true name of Ra, and I command you to flow out from his body and leave him unharmed. I, Isis, decree that Ra shall live."

With that, the venom was drawn out of Ra's body.

In an instant, Ra stopped shaking and felt his power return to him. He had been cured and he was thankful to Isis, even if he was now less trusting than before.

Isis commanded that the venom leave Ra's bo

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RA

GOD OF THE SUN

Ra was responsible for making the sun rise and set each day. He grew in importance for the Egyptians as the centuries went on, and for a short time the pharaoh Akhenaten attempted to make the Aten, a form of Ra, the only god worshipped.

SUN DISK
Ra carried the sun upon his head in the form of a red disk, often surrounded by a cobra.

SCARAB BEETLE
Sometimes Ra would become Ra-Khepri, a giant beetle that rolled the sun into the sky.

BENNU BIRD
This was a divine bird, similar to a heron, that was sacred to Ra in Egyptian mythology.

SOLAR BARQUE
This was the type of boat that Ra sailed through the underworld at night and the sky in the day.

PARENTS
: None

CHILDREN
: Hathor, Ma'at, and many more

SACRED SYMBOLS

THREE FORMS OF THE SUN
There were three forms taken by the sun god: a scarab beetle, a human, and a falcon. Sometimes Ra would appear as one, and other times as a combination, such as the man with a falcon head.

GOD

HATHOR

GODDESS OF JOY AND DANCE

Hathor was the goddess of many of the things that Egyptians considered joyful, including dancing, music, and love. She was regarded as the mother of the pharaohs and was sometimes depicted feeding them as babies in her cow form.

COW
Sometimes Hathor was shown in the form of a divine cow, known as the "Great Wild Cow."

SYCOMORE TREE
Hathor could appear as a sycomore tree, which produced figs enjoyed by the Egyptians.

MENAT NECKLACE
This was a beaded necklace that Egyptians shook during their worship of Hathor.

SISTRUM
This musical instrument was an important part of ceremonies held in honor of Hathor.

PARENTS
: Ra

CHILDREN
: Ihy

SACRED SYMBOLS

EYE OF RA
Hathor was originally created from the eye of the sun god Ra, and she is often depicted carrying the red solar disk on her head between cow horns. She was sometimes worshipped as Ra's wife.

GODDESS

The HumansRebel

Ra had ruled as king of the gods and mortals for three hundred and sixty-three years. One day, he decided to sail from Nubia to Edfu, to visit the god Horus the Elder.

When he arrived and went to greet Horus the Elder, however, Horus had some terrible news for the sun god. “I have heard that the humans are plotting against you,” Horus informed him. “They plan to sneak up on you when you least expect it and take your place as ruler of Egypt.”

Ra grew furious at Horus’s words and decided something would have to be done to stop the human rebellion before it went any further. Placing a hand on Horus’s chest, Ra allowed his own power to flow into the other god. Before Ra’s eyes Horus transformed into a dazzling sphere of light, with two gigantic, feathered wings on either side of his body.

"Go, Horus, and find my enemies!" Ra commanded. At Ra's words, the blinding ball of light that was Horus soared into the sky on his magnificent wings.

Now Horus could see all the land below him and it did not take long for him to spy the treacherous humans. A small group had hidden themselves among the long reeds that bordered the River Nile, and were waiting patiently for Ra's boat to sail by.

Little did the humans know they were no longer alone.

Without a sound, Horus flew closer to the people's camp so that his light shone straight down upon them. Blinded by the dazzling beam, the humans spun on the spot trying to understand what was happening. They could neither see nor hear anything and thought they were being attacked. Confused, they waved their spears in the air trying to slay their invisible enemy, but instead they only hit each other. One by one, the people fell to the ground, dead. The humans had defeated themselves, leaving Ra to sail by unharmed.

Hathor and the Beer

Ra ruled for many years, and as time passed he grew older. His bones turned to silver, his skin developed a golden shine, and his hair took on the color of the mesmerizing blue stone lapis lazuli.

Seeing Ra age made one group of humans believe that he was growing weaker. Once again they plotted to overthrow him and take control of the kingdom. Ra, however, learned of their plan. He was disappointed that the humans had grown restless once more and turned to Nun for advice, asking, "Oldest of all the gods, tell me, what would you do about these mortals who seek to challenge me again?"

"There is only one goddess with the power to stop them," Nun replied. "But she is currently your eye. So first you must set her free from your body. Then she can journey out into the world on your behalf."

Ra saw wisdom in Nun's words and plucked his eye from his face.

Using his powers, Ra transformed the staring eye into a new shape, so that it took on the form of a goddess with the long ears and horns of a cow. Ra named her Hathor and, delighted with his new daughter, hugged her tightly.

As Nun had suggested, Ra sent Hathor out to punish the humans who plotted against him. Hathor did just as her father asked and journeyed to the farthest reaches of the desert where the rebellious mortals were hiding.

Hathor easily killed the humans one by one.

At first, Ra was pleased with Hathor's work, and he was soon no longer under threat of attack. However, Hathor had enjoyed her job just a little too much. After defeating the first group of people, she had developed a taste for violence, and blood.

Without any instructions from Ra, Hathor decided to carry on her rampage. She set out across Egypt in search of humans to punish, destroying everything in her path and leaving devastation in her wake.

Whenever Hathor killed, she transformed into another goddess entirely: Sekhmet, goddess of war and destroyer of enemies. Rather than her peaceful cow-like form, she now looked like a fierce lioness. Ra was shocked that Hathor was now Sekhmet. Something would have to be done to stop her. But what?

After some thought, Ra devised a cunning plan to end Sekhmet's reign of terror.

Ra sent a messenger to the island of Elephantine, far in the south of the River Nile. There, he was to gather a supply of red ocher, a mixture of clay and sand that was perfect for dying anything and everything a shade of the deepest red. Once the messenger had returned, Ra took the ocher to the temple where his most trusted priest lived. "Pulverize this ocher to a fine dust," Ra commanded. "And mix it with the freshest beer you can find." The priest did as instructed and the liquid he created resembled red blood. This was all part of Ra's plan.

"Excellent," Ra told the priest. "Make seven thousand jars of this mixture and ask your people to bring them to the field near the temple." Ra knew that Sekhmet would soon pass by this field and he went there to wait for her arrival.

When the priest's people appeared with the jars of red beer, Ra instructed them to pour the contents of every single one into the field. Soon they stood in a pool of red liquid that almost reached their knees. Their task completed, the people hurried from the field and hid from sight so they would not be spotted by Sekhmet when she arrived. Ra joined them to see what Sekhmet would do.

Soon Sekhmet was seen approaching the field.

The humans shook with terror but did not leave their hiding place for fear that Sekhmet would notice them. Instead, they watched and waited.

Sekhmet saw the field of red immediately and assumed, as Ra had hoped, that this was the scene of a recent battle. Excited, she marched into the waters and began to drink what she believed was blood. It tasted better than any blood she had ever drank before,

and in no time she had consumed every last drop. It was then that Ra stepped out to join her. “Father, what is this incredible mixture?’ she asked.

“It is a drink that can only be prepared by the humans,” Ra explained. “In fact, they could make it for you every year at a feast in your honor, if it pleases you. But you will have to let them live for the celebration to take place.”

“Of course!” Sekhmet agreed happily.

With her temper finally calmed, Sekhmet changed before Ra’s eyes.

In a flash she was Hathor once more. With a new appreciation for the humans, she decided instead to take on the role of goddess of love and joy, and Sekhmet was never seen again.

Sekhmet drank the blood-red beer in huge gulps.

The End of Ra's Reign

During his reign, Ra had grown more and more weary of the humans' attempts at rebellion. He was very old now and wished only for a peaceful life.

Ra knew that the only way to achieve this, however, would be to step down as king and travel far away, so that no one would ever be tempted to challenge him again. He gathered together all of the gods to tell them his decision. "My heart is heavy, and my body is tired," Ra told them. "It is time I gave up my throne."

"No!" they cried out at once. "You cannot go. Who will lead us?"

Ra had made up his mind, however, and could not be persuaded to remain.

"If you must go, then we cannot stop you," said Nun eventually. "We are your family, and we will support you in your decision. Someone must take your place as king, though."

The other gods gasped when Ra announced hisretirement.

Nun then addressed Shu, god of the air. “Shu, you shall rule in Ra’s place and watch over the world. As king, you will also protect Ra from the humans who threaten him.”
Next Nun spoke to Nut, Shu’s daughter and goddess of the sky. “Nut, you will have the most important task of all, for you shall carry Ra on your back so that he can live high above the Earth where he will be safe.”
Nut looked astonished, “But how?”
“Like this, silly child.” Nun replied, and

Nut’s body began to change and grow before

their eyes.

Nut was transformed into a giant cow, covered in the stars of the sky.

Now Ra was able to climb easily upon Nut’s back. However, not long after he had settled himself comfortably, they were approached by a group of humans. These people considered themselves loyal followers of the sun god and didn’t want to see him go. “We will punish those who betrayed you before, mighty Ra, so you may continue your reign in peace.”

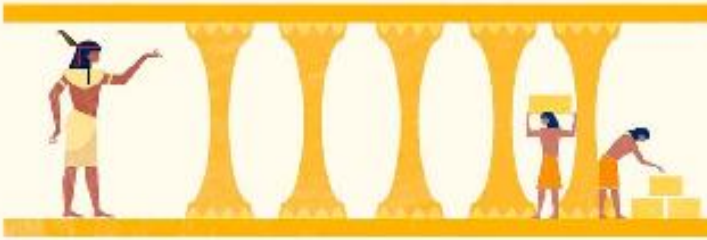
Nun spoke to Shu and Nut from the depths of the ocean.

Ra was not concerned with vengeance, however; he only wanted to rest, so he ignored them altogether. Unfortunately, the humans were not to be deterred. They set to work and together created heavy clubs and strong bows. It was their intention to use these inventions against the rebellious people, convinced this would make Ra proud. When Ra saw their weapons though, he was appalled.

"Your hearts are filled with violence, and I can bear it no longer," Ra shouted.

"Nut, take me far from this place, for I am done with these humans and their wars." Ra commanded. Just before he left, Ra made one last decree. "When the time comes, Isis and Osiris, your son shall take responsibility for carrying the sun." And so it was that Ra retired as the first king of Egypt and as the sun god, leaving the Earth forever.

Geb's Revenge



Just as Nun had commanded, Shu took over as king of Egypt once the sun god Ra had retired. In his newly appointed role, Shu was determined to bring order to the land.

Shu took his job very seriously. He wanted to bring peace between the gods and humans, so to try to stop the people rebelling again, he decided to create structure in their society and to give them purpose.

First, Shu divided Egypt into smaller sections, and appointed a local government in each area that would care for those who lived there.

These regions became known as "nomes."

Every nome had a nomarch, or governor, put in charge of it, who made sure everything ran as smoothly as possible and kept in contact with the neighboring nomes. In addition to splitting the land, Shu commanded that new temples should be built across Egypt in honor of himself and the other gods. This kept the humans busy, and also made the gods look on them more favorably. Egypt had been renewed and, at first, it seemed as though Shu's rule would be a successful one.

However, Shu's son, Geb, still held a grudge against his father for trying to stop Geb and Nut from having children—even if Shu hadn't succeeded. Geb was angry with his mother Tefnut as well, for her role in Shu's plan. Now that Shu was king, Geb decided he wanted revenge, and he plotted against them in secret.

Geb didn't have to wait long to make his move.

Shu had spent many days and nights battling the followers of the evil serpent Apophis. Although Shu was victorious, the fight had left him exhausted. In order to rest and heal, he left Earth behind for a short while to relax in the sky. It was then that Geb struck. He snuck into his parents' palace and kidnapped his own mother from her bed while she slept. His plan was to separate

Shu from his wife, just as Geb's parents had separated him from Nut. With Tefnut, the goddess of moisture, imprisoned, chaos was let loose, and a terrifying storm overwhelmed Egypt.

It was so dark that no one could see one another, and so loud that no one could hear each other.

When Shu realized what was going on, he returned to Earth.
"Geb, release your mother immediately!" he demanded.
Geb had his reply ready. "If you give me your throne, then I will release her."
At first, Shu flatly refused, but the storm continued to rage and leave Egypt in disarray. After nine whole days of lashing rain and crashing thunder, Shu eventually gave in. Geb was crowned king and finally forgave his parents.

Despite how Geb had inherited the throne, he was determined to be a good king. He wished wholeheartedly to follow in the footsteps of Ra and Shu, and to rule Egypt fairly and honorably. In order to do this, he believed that he must wear the uraeus of Ra.

The royal uraeus was a golden crown adorned with a living, breathing cobra.

The uraeus had been stored inside a locked chest to keep it safe after Ra retired. However, as king, Geb had the power to retrieve it. He heaved open the heavy lid of the chest and all of a sudden the uraeus sprang out from the dark depths of the box and let loose a terrifying gush of orange flames from its mouth. The fire scalded Geb's skin and he slammed the lid shut again, realizing that there was no way he could place the creature on his brow without some

sort of protection. Recalling how Ra wore a magnificent wig as king, Geb now suspected it may have been more than it seemed.

Ra had left his wig behind when he left for the sky and Geb sent his followers to fetch it.

When the followers returned, Geb took the wig of Ra from their hands and placed it snug upon his head. He immediately let out a sigh of relief as he felt the wig's magic soothe his burned skin. Taking a deep breath, he opened the chest once again and lifted the writhing uraeus from its container. This time he was able to place the crown and snake atop his head, and there the cobra calmly sat for many years, until it was time for Geb, too, to step down as king.

OSIRIS

GOD OF THE DEAD

Osiris was god of the dead and the ruler of the Egyptian underworld, known as Duat. After Set chopped him up into pieces, Osiris had to be wrapped in bandages to hold him together. This made him the first ever mummy.

CROOK AND FLAIL
These items are thought to symbolize Osiris's role as a ruler and shepherd of the people.

DJED
This column was believed to be the backbone of Osiris and a symbol of stability.

ATEF CROWN
Osiris wore a distinctive tall white crown adorned with ostrich feathers.

BEARD
Many pharaohs wore a false beard to copy Osiris's appearance, even female pharaohs.

PARENTS
: Geb and Nut

CHILDREN
: Anubis and Horus the Younger

SACRED SYMBOLS
FLOODING OF THE NILE
After Osiris was killed by Set and left Earth to rule the underworld, his wife, Isis, was heartbroken. Every year when the Nile flooded, the Egyptians believed it was as a result of her tears from his absence.

GOD

ISIS

GODDESS OF LIFE AND MAGIC

Isis was the most skilled of all the Egyptian gods in the art of magic. In particular, she was renowned for her skills in healing, and because of her role as mother of Horus she became associated with life and birth itself.

THRONE
This was the hieroglyph used to represent Isis and indicated her importance to the Egyptians.

TYET
This symbol represented a piece of knotted material sometimes worn as an amulet by Isis.

ANKH
Another symbol and hieroglpyh associated with Isis, the ankh represented divine and royal power.

KITE
Isis and her sister, Nephthys, often appeared as birds called kites, or as women with the wings of a kite.

PARENTS
: Geb and Nut

CHILDREN
: Horus the Younger

SACRED SYMBOLS
ADOPTED BY THE GREEKS
Due to their encounters with the Egyptians, Isis was also worshipped by the ancient Greeks and Romans. She continued to grow in popularity and the Romans even built a temple dedicated to her in London.

GODDESS

King Osiris

As Geb aged, he watched with pride as his eldest son, Osiris, grew into a wise and confident young man.

Everyone looked up to Osiris, and not just because he was tall. He was a good and fair god, so it seemed an easy decision for Geb to hand over his crown to Osiris when Geb grew too weary to govern any longer.

King Osiris ruled Egypt and the humans alongside his wife, Isis. Together, they ushered in

a new age for humankind. Isis discovered wheat and barley, and Osiris showed the mortals how to grow it, so they no longer had to rely solely on hunting for food. The gods also created laws that forbade humans from harming one another or behaving unjustly.

Osiris and Isis continued the work of those who ruled before them to bring peace to Egypt.

However, all was not well. Osiris and Isis had two siblings, Set and Nephthys, who had also married. Set was extremely jealous of his brother. He felt bitter about Osiris inheriting their father's throne rather than himself, and he looked for any opportunity to get the better of the king.

Isis gave the humans wheat and barley, and Osiris

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The animosity between the brothers only became worse when one evening, in the dark, Osiris mistook Nephthys for Isis, and Nephthys mistook Osiris for Set. It was only after Nephthys became pregnant with Osiris's son that they realized their mistake.

Set flew into a rage when he discovered what had happened.

When Nephthys gave birth to a son, she abandoned the boy in the desert because she was scared of what Set might do. There, she thought no one would be able to find him.

Isis, meanwhile, who had a habit of finding out everything, learned of the child, but she was not angry with Osiris or Nephthys. She understood, unlike Set, that it had been an accident. Isis hated the thought that the baby was alone and would never know his family, so she went to ask Nephthys where he was.

Nephthys, however, refused to tell Isis where she had left her son, so Isis set out in search of him.

Gathering her most loyal hounds, Isis explained to them exactly what it was she sought. Her dogs had an amazingly sharp sense of smell and, with their noses to the ground, they led Isis out across the deserts of Egypt.

Finally, after many grueling days, the dogs sniffed the scent of the child on the wind. Barking and whining, they ran to a tall dune. There, Isis found the squealing baby, bundled up, and lying on the sand.

Isis scooped him up and curiously peered down at the boy's face.

While the baby had the body of a boy, he had the furry head of a jackal—a type of wild dog. Smitten, Isis decided to raise him as her own. "I shall name you Anubis," Isis stated. "And you shall be my son," she added, smiling down at her adopted child.

Isis held the baby Anubis in her arms.

The First Mummy

Set was becoming more and more jealous of his brother Osiris. He didn't see why Osiris got to rule Egypt, so he decided that he would steal the throne.

Set longed to overthrow Osiris, but he was aware that he needed to be careful and plot in secret. Brute force alone would not work, and Osiris also had all-knowing Isis at his side. Set was cunning, though, and he came up with a plan.

One evening, when Osiris was snoozing on his throne, Set snuck up to him. Careful not to wake him, Set took his brother's measurements.

Set carefully made note of Osiris's height from head to toe, and his breadth from shoulder to shoulder.

Next Set proceeded to construct a giant wooden chest in the shape of a man, exactly the size and build of Osiris himself. He had his followers decorate the chest with colorful paints and gemstones, so it dazzled anyone who saw it. Then Set arranged a party. Alongside seventy-two of his most loyal followers, Set invited his brother to join him for an evening of the finest food and entertainment. An invitation that Osiris, suspecting nothing, gladly accepted.

Once the party was in full swing, Set announced that he had something special to show his guests. At his command, the doors to the room swung open and the glorious chest was carried inside. Everyone quickly swarmed around the object, "ooh-ing" and "aah-ing" at its beauty.

"I propose a competition," Set proclaimed. "Whichever person fits perfectly inside this chest may keep it."

One by one, everyone took their turn at lying down in the chest. Some were too tall, and their feet dangled over the edge of the box. Others were too short, and their toes could not scrape the bottom, no matter how hard they stretched. Finally, it was Osiris's turn. When Set's brother lay down in the chest, legs perfectly straight and

Set slammed the lid of the chest over Osiris.

arms at his sides, there was no space left unfilled. He was the perfect size. Before Osiris could celebrate his victory, however, Set jumped on the chest, holding Osiris in place. “What’s going on, brother?” Osiris cried out in surprise.

“I’m sick of living in your shadow,” Set growled back.

Before Osiris had a chance to respond, the heavy lid of the chest was slammed down on his face. Hot, molten lead was then poured along the seams of the container, sealing it shut.

No matter how hard Osiris pounded at the walls of his prison, he could not escape.

“Take him away,” Set commanded. Together, Set’s followers lifted the chest onto their shoulders and carried it out.

Set had already instructed them what to do. His followers took the chest down to the River Nile where they threw it into the water without a second thought. Standing on the shore, they watched as the current carried the chest away, then returned to Set to tell him that his plan had succeeded and that Osiris was surely dead.

When Osiris did not return to his chambers the next day, Isis grew suspicious. She began to ask around the palace if anyone had seen him recently. When she discovered the events of the previous night, she was horrified.

Unable to contain her grief, Isis began to wander the halls of he home, crying out to everyone to ask if they had seen the chest.

By chance Isis stopped to talk to a group of children she was passing by, to see if they had seen her missing husband. Then she learned where she might find Osiris's body.

"Do not cry, Isis, we have seen the chest," the children explained. "We were playing by the river and saw it floating down the Nile on its way out to sea."

Without hesitation, Isis sped to the river. She looked for a long time in search of the chest before she found it trapped inside a tree that had grown around it. Quickly, she scrambled to free it. When Isis brought the chest back home, she decided to hide it in the desert to keep it safe until she could find a way to revive Osiris. However, when Set was out hunting the next day, he spotted it in the sandy dunes and suspected Isis had rescued it.

Set knew Isis was a powerful magician.

Determined to prevent the queen from using her magic to restore her husband's life, Set broke the chest open. To be sure that Osiris would not be so easily discovered this time, Set took his brother's body out of the box and tore it into tiny pieces. He then scattered these pieces across Egypt, so they would be nearly impossible to find.

However, Isis was not willing to give up on her husband. Even if it took her a thousand years, she swore she would find every piece of him and put him back together. Nephthys, her sister and Set's wife, was equally appalled by her husband's actions and promised to help Isis in her search.

Both goddesses traveled across the desert plains of Egypt in search of Osiris's body parts. Bit by bit, they returned them to the palace.

In time, they had found almost every piece of him, apart from one. At first, Isis worried that without this final piece she would not be able to reassemble Osiris.

Isis's adopted son Anubis had an idea, though.

Anubis took the body parts of the king and laid them out next to each other on the stone table in his workshop. Under his instruction, Isis used her magic to conjure up a replacement for the missing piece, and she and Anubis murmured incantations of healing over Osiris's completed body.

Anubis then took a seemingly endless reel of white bandages from a shelf and began to

75
Anubis wrapped Osiris's body in bandages, making him into the first mummy

mmy.

wrap them around the pieces of Osiris, binding them all together. While he wound the bandages around Osiris, Isis sang a spell to bring her husband back to life.

Finally, Osiris's body was wrapped from neck to toe and all Isis and Anubis could do was wait.

"Isis?" the body croaked.

Isis let out a sob and rushed to hug Osiris's mummified form. He had returned to her!

Finally reunited, Isis soon became pregnant with Osiris's son. However, their precious time together would not last long. "When I was away," explained Osiris, "I spent time in the underworld among the dead. Now I must return because they also need a king. I will rule over them, but one day our son will become king of Egypt."

And so, with a heavy heart, Osiris returned to the underworld. This meant scheming Set was now the uncontested ruler of Egypt, just as he had planned.

Horus and the Snake

With Osiris ruling the underworld, Set took over as king of Egypt. Angry at Isis and Nephthys for helping Osiris, he locked them both away.

However, with each other's help, the pregnant Isis and her sister were able to escape. Together, the women fled to the marshlands on the farthest edge of the River Nile, where they hid themselves from Set's wrath.

It was in the marshes of the riverbank that Isis gave birth to her son. He had the head of a magnificent falcon, and she called him Horus the Younger, after Horus the Elder, whom he closely resembled.

With the help of Nephthys and the goddess Hathor, Isis raised Horus in secret.

Isis knew she must keep Horus as far away from his uncle as possible. There were more dangers on Earth than Set, however. One evening, when Isis returned from a brief stroll, the goddess was shocked to discover Horus lying still in the grass. He was a young boy now and Isis had trusted

he would be fine if left alone for only a short time. Yet, to her dismay, something terrible had befallen him.

Within a split second Isis was kneeling on the ground beside her son, leaning over his body to try to see what had happened. She had grabbed his shoulders and lifted his face up to her own when the smell of his breath hit her. With her unrivaled knowledge, she recognized the scent immediately. "He has been bitten by a snake!" she called out into the dark night.

It just so happened that at that moment the god Thoth was passing by.

Thoth heard Isis's cry and immediately followed the sound of her voice to see what had made Isis so scared. "Horus," he gasped when he saw the boy immobile. "He must be saved for he is the only one who can overthrow Set." These words only made Isis angrier.

"Well, don't just stand there," she shouted. "Do something!"

Thoth nodded and began to recite a lengthy spell over the child's body. It took many hours but eventually the magic did its job. Horus's eyelids fluttered open, and he found himself staring up at the tear-stained face of his mother, groggy but alive.

HORUS

GOD OF THE SKY AND KINGS

Sky god Horus was thought to rule over the lands of fertile black soil left behind by the flooding of the Nile. As one of the first kings of Egypt, he was associated with the pharaohs. Horus the younger and elder were two different forms of this god.

LANNER FALCON
Horus was shown with either just the head of a falcon or sometimes as the whole bird.

EYE OF HORUS
The eye of Horus, otherwise known as the udjat, was a symbol of protection.

DOUBLE CROWN
This combined red-and-white crown symbolized the union of Upper and Lower Egypt.

SUN AND MOON
After Ra retired, the eyes of Horus were said to represent the sun and moon.

PARENTS
: Osiris and Isis

CHILDREN
: Many

SACRED SYMBOLS

PHARAOHS AS GODS
As Horus was appointed king by the other gods, he symbolized the right to rule. The ruling pharaoh was, therefore, believed to be the human embodiment of Horus himself.

GOD

SET

GOD OF STORMS AND DISORDER

Set was the god of all things chaotic and disorderly. Due to this, he was feared most above all the other gods. He had the head of the mythical "Set animal," and was believed to rule over the sandy red lands of the desert.

WAS SCEPTER
This scepter was a symbol of power that had a representation of Set's head at its end.

DESERTS
Set was the god of deserts since they represented a place of danger beyond the Nile.

HIPPOPOTAMUS
The hippo was associated with Set because of the destruction it caused to crops.

SET ANIMAL
This legendary creature had the body of a dog, a two-pronged tail, and a long snout.

PARENTS
: Geb and Nut

CHILDREN
: Sobek and many more

SACRED SYMBOLS

SET AND THE HYKSOS
Around 1700 BCE, Lower Egypt was taken over by a group of people known as the Hyksos. Set was their favorite god, so during this time he was once more considered a king of gods.

GOD

Horus versus Set

Soon Horus had reached adulthood, and he decided it was time for him to take back his father's throne and avenge the horrible trick that Set had played to steal the kingship.

Horus explained his plan to his mother, Isis, and she was overjoyed. She had been preparing for this moment and, on her son's behalf, she called for a meeting of all the gods so that he could bring his case before them.

The gods gathered together, intrigued to find out what Horus had to tell them. Hathor and Geb stood chatting and sharing jokes, while Thoth was deep in thought. Set tried his hardest to appear calm, but inside he seethed with rage.

All the gods fell silent, however, when Horus stood up.

"It should have been me who inherited the throne as Osiris's son," Horus called out. "Set stole the throne from my father and should step down as king."

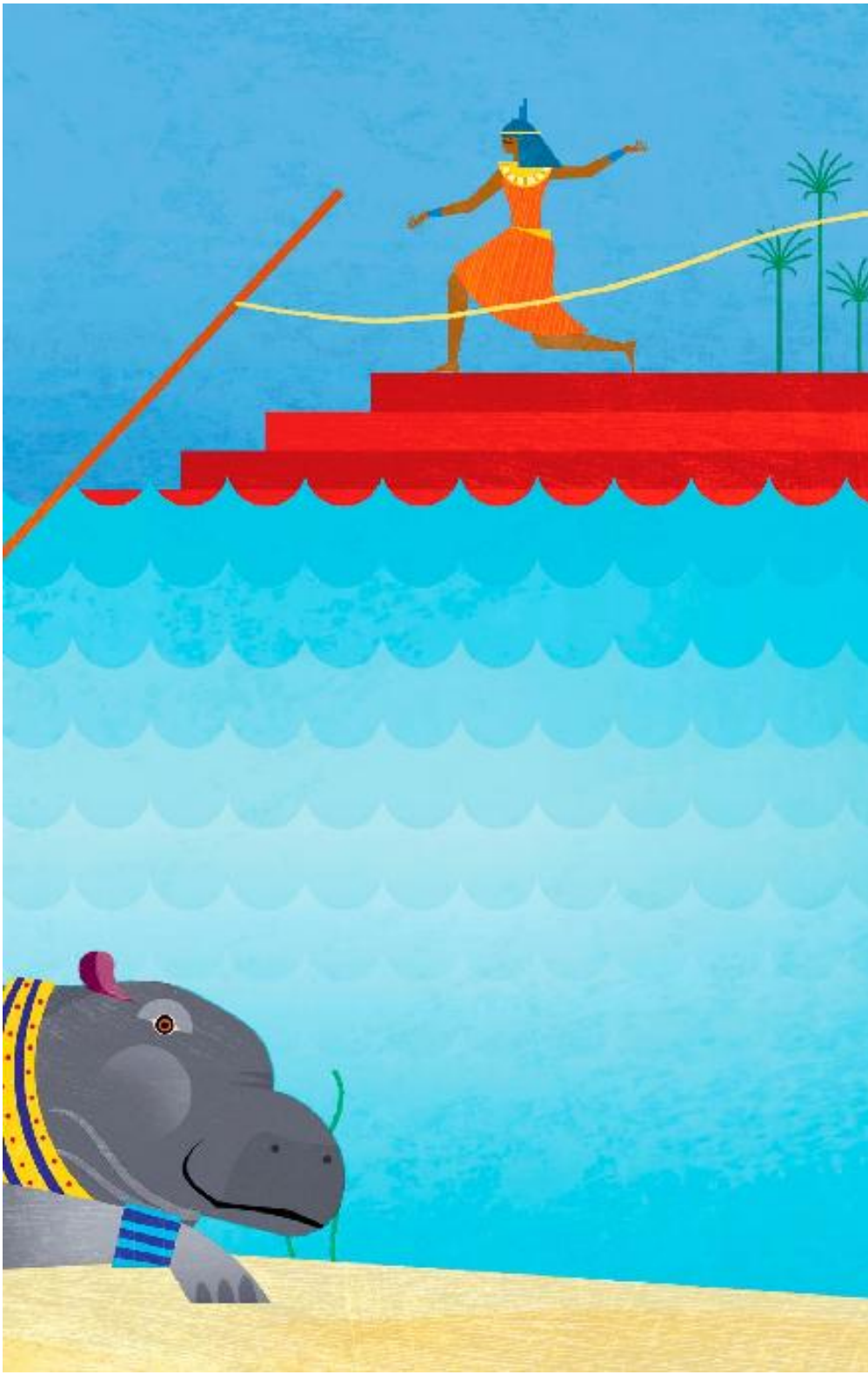
"Nonsense," cried Set. "I am older and therefore it is I who should rightfully rule."

Both Shu and Thoth agreed with Horus and demanded he be given his father's crown. Atum and Tefnut, however, were inclined to side with Set.

With all the gods divided in their opinions, squabbling broke out among them. Insults were flung from both sides, and years passed without any decisions being made. Scared he would eventually lose, Set proposed a competition instead. “Nephew,” Set addressed Horus. “Let us transform into hippopotamuses and submerge ourselves in the deepest part of the Nile. If, in the next three months, either of us raises our head above the water, he will forfeit the crown.”

Horus agreed and so both gods transformed into hippos and lay down on the bottom of the river beside each other.

Isis, however, was convinced that Set intended to kill her son while they were down there. She was so afraid that she fetched the longest rope she could find and tied it to the end of a harpoon she had made from solid bronze. Isis launched the harpoon into the river with all her might, but she could not see where she was aiming. The barbed end struck Horus and he yelled out in pain. “Mother,” he cried from beneath the water. “Call back your harpoon for it is your son you have struck.”



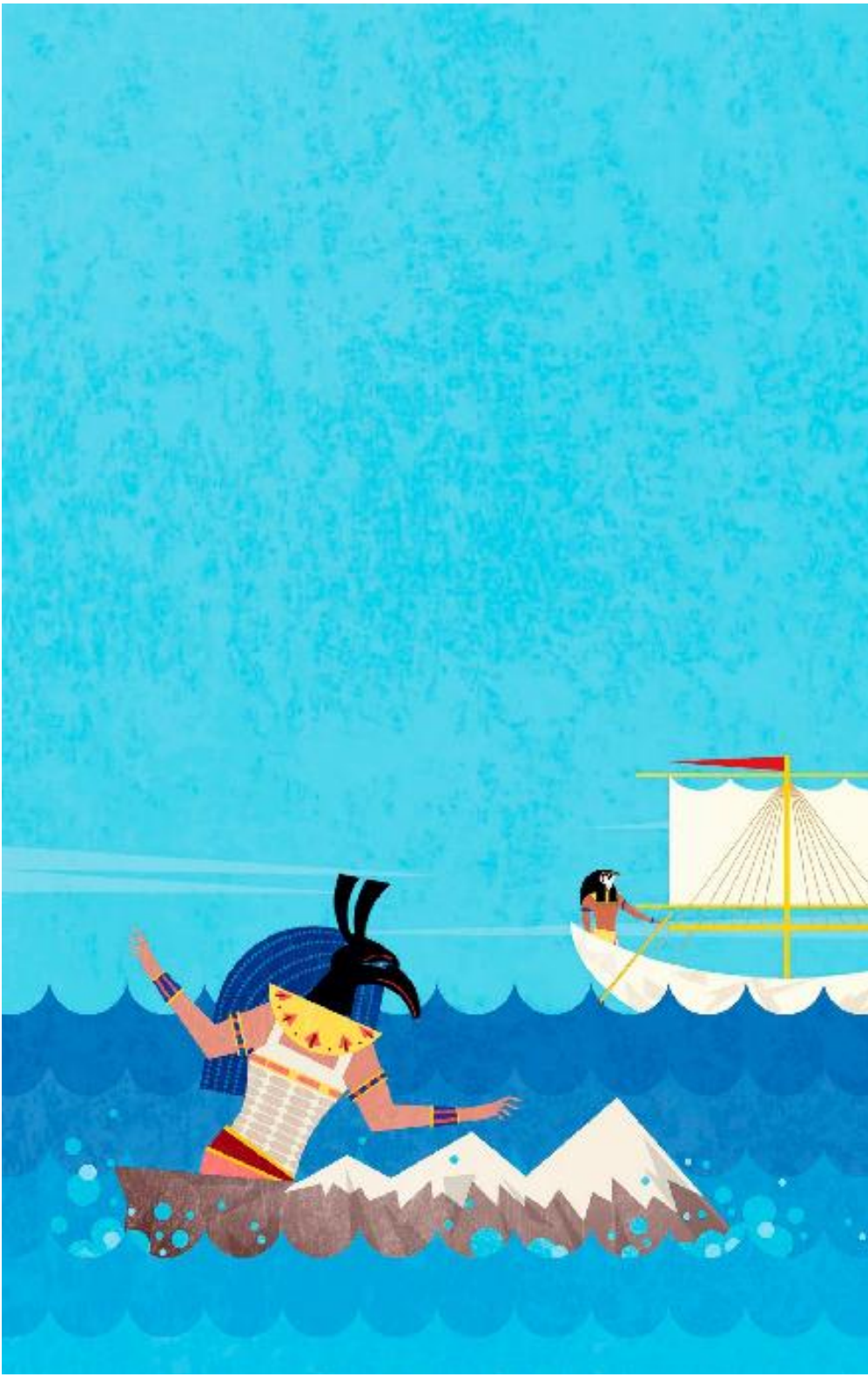
Appalled, Isis hauled the harpoon back and tried once again to cast it into the river. This time she hit her mark.

The sharp point struck Set, who hollered so loudly that every fish within a mile of him scattered in surprise.

"Sister," Set yelled. "I am your brother, would you really harm me when I can do nothing to defend myself?"

Isis could not help it, she was moved by Set's words and without thinking she pulled back the harpoon once again. Unfortunately, Horus took this as a sign that his mother had taken his uncle's side and burst out of the water, enraged, immediately losing the competition.

Due to Isis's interference, though, the rest of the gods were not yet willing to declare Horus the loser. Set therefore demanded another contest, confident that he would win again.



"I propose that we both build boats out of stone," Set suggested, "and race them across the Nile. First to cross the river wins."
Horus agreed, but he was determined not to lose again. He built his ship from cedar wood, which he coated with white plaster so that it looked as though it was made from rock. It was so convincing that when Set saw it floating on the water he did not question what it was made from.

For his own vessel, Set chopped off the top of a nearby mountain.

Set hollowed out the mountaintop, so he could sit comfortably inside, and both boats were ready to set sail. As soon as they set off, however, Set realized his mistake. While Horus's ship sailed calmly across the river, Set's sunk like the rock it was.
Furious, Set transformed himself once again into a gigantic hippo and swam in his nephew's direction. When he approached the ship, he

used his weight to topple the vessel so that Horus fell into the water with a loud splash. "Enough is enough!" cried Horus, clambering onto the riverbank soaked to his skin. "We have already spent eighty years trying to decide which one of us should be king. Let Set and I be judged by the gods, not these silly competitions."

The other gods were humbled by Horus's words and agreed they could not waste any more time.

It was wise Thoth who came up with a solution. "I will write to Osiris in the underworld. As the last king, it is his right to choose his successor."

Osiris was quick to write back, and his judgment was clear. "Why should my son be denied his inheritance? Proclaim Horus king!"

The other gods accepted Osiris's decree and so Horus was crowned. Set was so angry that Ra had to carry him up to the sky, where he could unleash his fury in the form of thunder.

Horus was king for many years. When he grew tired, he handed the throne to Thoth. After more than seven thousand years, Thoth in turn passed on the crown. For twelve generations the gods ruled until it was decided to appoint the first mortal king instead.

PHARAOHS AND ROYALTY

When the Egyptian gods finally decided to retire from ruling the Earth, they chose to pass the crown to the mortals themselves. From then on, Egypt was ruled by generations of human kings and queens. The ancient Egyptians saw the pharaohs as divine beings on Earth who would one day ascend to the heavens. Just like the gods, the myths of the pharaohs were preserved for all to hear.

King Khufu and the Magician

One day, the then ruler of Egypt, King Khufu, sat in his throne room along with his many sons. Tired of work, he had asked his children to tell him stories to pass the time.

Gladly, each man took it in turn to share tales of past kings and impressive feats of magic from times long ago. When the role of storyteller reached Prince Hardjedef, however, he informed the rest of the room that he did not have a tale to tell.

"Father, you have heard here today many remarkable stories, which may or may not be true. But don't you know that the most skilled magician of all is alive today and lives right here in your kingdom?"

The king and the prince's brothers looked astounded.

"Who is this man?" Khufu asked.

"His name is Djedi and he lives in the town of Djed-Snefru," the prince replied. "He is one hundred and ten years old, but is still more powerful than any younger man."

The other men in the room shook their heads and laughed at Hardjedef's words. Undeterred, the prince carried on.

"It is true. Every day Djedi eats five hundred loaves of bread and half a cow, which he washes down with one hundred jugs of beer. He can tame a mighty lion so it is as gentle as a household cat, and he can rejoin a severed head with its body. He even knows the secret location of the sanctuary of Thoth and how many rooms are inside."
"I must meet this man!" announced the king, who was thoroughly impressed by his son's words. "Hardjedef, take as many ships as you need and travel to Djed-Snefru to invite the magician to our palace."

The next day, the prince did as his father had instructed and sailed down the River Nile.

Upon docking their ships at the town of Djed-Snefru, Hardjedef stopped to ask a nearby fisherman where he could find the magician Djedi. The man kindly pointed him in the right direction and the group set off to find him.

Soon Hardjedef and his men located the home of Djedi. They found the magician seated outside while one member of his household rubbed his feet and another massaged his scalp.

Although he was more than one hundred years old, he seemed as spry as a man of Hardjedef's age.

"Greetings, Djedi. I have traveled far to bring you a message from my father, the king. He has heard of your great skill in magic and invites you to live in our palace. There, you will be taken care of for the remainder of your years and given a royal funeral when your time comes to travel to the underworld."

"How generous!" exclaimed Djedi. "Of course I will come with you, so long as I can bring my children and my scrolls." Hardjedef happily agreed.

As soon as the two men arrived at the palace, Hardjedef took the magician to meet his father. “Welcome, Djedi!” the king said, clapping his hands together. “Tell me, is it true that you can rejoin a head that has been severed from its body?”

“Indeed I can,” Djedi replied. “If you bring me an animal, I will show you.”

King Khufu was excited to see the magician at work and immediately sent for a goose.

Presently, a soldier returned with a goose. The king told him to chop off its head and place it on the other side of the room.

Without hesitation, the magician waved his hands in the air and recited an ancient spell. Everyone gasped as the body of the goose began to waddle upright while the head rolled toward it along the floor. When the two met, there was a loud crack, and the goose raised its neck to look curiously around the room, alive and whole again.

"Incredible!" cried the king. "You are indeed a great magician. Is it also true that you know the number of rooms in the sanctuary of Thoth?"
"I do not," said Djedi. "But I know where you can find that out. The secret lies in a chest in the city of Heliopolis."

"Then I must have this chest brought to me," declared Khufu.

"Only the eldest of the Lady Redjedet's three unborn sons can bring it to you," Djedi informed him. "If you are patient, he will bring you the chest one day, and he will even become king after your own sons."
"I understand," nodded Khufu. "Thank you. Please stay with us here in the palace and you will be well taken care of."
And he was. From that day on, Djedi ate one thousand loaves of bread a day followed by an entire cow, not just half.

In the city of Heliopolis, Lady Redjedet lived with her husband, Rewoser. He was the priest of Ra. Together, Redjedet and Rewoser were expecting triplets.

When the time came for their babies to be born, Redjedet had a painful labor. Ra could see everything that was happening, and after many hours without the birth of a single baby, he decided to help his followers. He summoned the four goddesses Isis, Nephthys, Meskhenet, and frog-headed Heket, who were all experts in childbirth. "Please go and help Lady Redjedet," implored Ra. "If you assist them now, her sons will one day dedicate great temples to you all."

The four goddesses liked the sound of that, so they traveled to Heliopolis disguised as a group of dancing girls.

The goddesses also invited the ram-headed god Khnum to join them, since he had the breath of life that imparted good health on mortal children.

When the gods arrived at the home of Redjedet, they were greeted by her husband. His face was marred by worry as he welcomed the group.

"We heard there is a woman here in need of assistance," Isis told Rewoser.
"That is my wife, Redjedet!" exclaimed Rewoser. "She is having great trouble in childbirth. Can you help her?"
The gods nodded, and Rewoser quickly led them to the room where his wife was. Heket stood by Redjedet's side and used magic to speed the births along.

Meanwhile, Isis stood before Redjedet with her hands outstretched and called to the first child.

"Do not keep your power inside your mother, you whose name means powerful!" Isis whispered. In moments, the first baby boy was born and she caught him in her arms. The child's skin shone like gold, and he already wore on his head a cloth of royal blue. Nephthys then washed and dried the baby before Khnum leaned over him and blessed him with good health. Finally, Meskhenet took the child and looked into his future.
"You will one day be a great king," she declared.

Redjedet give birth. Isis and Heket helped

Next came the second child, whose name, Isis declared, meant "kicking," followed by the third, whose name meant "darkness." Both babies were washed and dried before Khnum blessed them with his magic and Meskhenet declared them each future kings. The three boys were handed to Redjedet and Rewoser, who were exhausted but delighted.

Finally, the gods announced that their work was done and it was time they left the couple to celebrate.

Rewoser, however, would not let the group leave without giving them a token of his gratitude. He brought from the house's stores a large sack of the finest barley. "Please take this grain as a thank-you for helping my wife," Rewoser said. "It will brew the most delicious beer, or will fetch a very good price if you need money during your travels."

The five guests accepted the barley gratefully and left with smiles on their faces from a job well done. Not far from the house, however, Isis stopped in her tracks.

"Why did we come here if it was not to bestow these newborn children with wonders that only we can give?" Isis asked the others.

Her companions agreed. So together, they fashioned three crowns of gold and hid them in the sack of barley they had been given. They then turned back to the house and knocked on the door once more.

"Rewoser," Isis said when he opened the door. "Will you please keep this grain for us until we return from performing in the north? It is too heavy to carry all the way."

Rewoser agreed and off they went once more, with no intention of returning again.

It just so happened that two weeks later, Redjedet was checking the stocks of the household goods and asked her maid why they had no beer. The maid told her that the only barley they had was that which they were keeping for the

dancers. Redjedet told the maid

to open the sack and that they would
replace it before the dancers returned.
When the maid went to fetch the
barley, however, she was surprised to

hear the sounds of singing and dancing
coming from inside the sack itself.

Shocked, the maid ran back to her mistress to tell her what she had heard.

Redjedet went to the storeroom
herself and was equally surprised to hear
music and laughter coming from the bag.
Instead of opening it, Redjedet
decided to lock the sack of grain up in
a heavy chest and wait for her husband
to return. When Rewoser eventually
came home, Redjedet explained what
had happened.

A look of joy spread over Rewoser's face.

"Rejoice my dear, for our sons are
surely blessed! That is the noise of a
coronation—one day they shall be
kings!" he cried.
And he was right.

THOTH

GOD OF WISDOM

Thoth was the god of knowledge, and he usually appeared as a man with the head of a bird known as an ibis. He was wise beyond all others, and the gods often turned to him for advice or to settle arguments among them.

IBIS
In human form, Thoth had an ibis' head, but sometimes he took the shape of the whole bird.

CRESCENT MOON
When in animal form, Thoth could be identified by the crescent moon on his head.

BABOON
Baboons were a symbol of Thoth. The Egyptians associated them with wisdom.

PAPYRUS SCROLL
Thoth recorded important information, so he was often shown holding a papyrus scroll.

PARENTS
: Ra

CHILDREN
: Seshat

SACRED SYMBOLS

INVENTOR OF HIEROGLYPHS
Thoth was believed to have invented hieroglyphs and taught humans how to write. Ancient Egyptian scribes, who wrote for a living, were known as followers of Thoth.

GOD

MA'AT

GODDESS OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE

The winged goddess Ma'at was in charge of justice. She was thought to maintain cosmic harmony among the other gods. The feather of Ma'at represented truth and was used to judge souls in the underworld.

FEATHER OF MA'AT
Ma'at always wore an ostrich feather on her head. It represented truth and justice.

WINGS
Ma'at was often shown with a pair of huge wings attached to her arms.

THE SEASONS
As goddess of order within the universe, Ma'at was thought to be responsible for the seasons.

WEIGHING SCALES
Ma'at's feather was placed on the scales used in the afterlife to judge if a person had lived an honest life.

PARENTS
: Ra

CHILDREN
: Seshat

SACRED SYMBOLS

LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE
Ma'at was believed to uphold the laws of the universe. The pharaohs were considered to be chosen by the goddess to enact her will on Earth. These laws were intended to prevent chaos from overrunning Egypt.

GODDESS

Queen Serpot

In the land of Assyria, which neighbored Egypt, there was a state made up entirely of women. These women were mighty warriors, who were undefeated in battle.

The women were ruled by a formidable queen named Serpot. One day, Serpot's scouts informed her that the Egyptian prince Pedikhons and his soldiers had set up camp nearby. Concerned for her people, Serpot decided to send her most trusted soldier, Ashteshyt, to spy on them. That night, Ashteshyt snuck into the camp disguised as a man and learned that the prince hoped to bring the women's land under Egyptian rule.

When Serpot heard of the prince's plan, she was outraged and decided to attack the invaders first.

Serpot gathered her army and before the sun rose, stormed the prince's camp. The Egyptians were groggy with sleep but reacted quickly. The two

sides fought fiercely until the sun set and the survivors, too exhausted to carry on, returned to their camps for the night.

When the next day came, however, and the Egyptians were preparing to fight again, Pedikhons told them to stay in their tents. Instead, he alone donned his armor and approached the fortress of Queen Serpot. The prince had realized that the Egyptians stood no chance against her mighty warriors, so he demanded a one-to-one fight between himself and the queen. Struck by his bravery, Serpot agreed.

Serpot and Pedikhons faced each other on the battlefield that same day. But, as it turned out, they were too evenly matched. When one struck, the other deflected. If one lunged, the other dodged. So on it went for many hours until the two began to laugh aloud.

"We will never defeat one another," smiled Serpot. "Let us share a meal instead."

The two rulers dined together that evening and found they had much in common besides war. In fact, they enjoyed each other's company so much, that by the end of the evening they realized that instead of wanting to fight each other, they might even be falling in love.

The Doomed Prince

There once was a prince who was his father's only child. When he was young, a prophecy declared that the prince would one day die because of either a dog, a crocodile, or a snake.

In order to protect his son from this terrible fate, the king had a house built for him in the middle of the desert. There, the prince was raised by a nurse who watched over him carefully, making sure he never strayed too far.

One day, the prince and his nurse had gone for a stroll when the young man spotted someone in the distance with a creature he did not recognize.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing at the animal.

"That is a greyhound," explained the nurse. "But you must stay away from it, for it is a type of dog, which is one of the three animals that the prophecy warned you against."

The prince dismissed the nurse's concerns. He was tired of being stuck in the house, unable to see the world. "I will have a greyhound of my own," he declared. "And it is time for me to leave this place."

The nurse was afraid, but could not disobey the prince. He was overjoyed with his new puppy and he immediately set out in a chariot to begin his adventure. Eventually, the prince reached the kingdom of Nahrin. The king of Nahrin had only one daughter and to ensure she had the finest husband, the king had locked her in a tower with windows seventy cubits from the ground and no other way in.

Only the man who could jump as high as her window could marry the princess.

As the prince stood by and watched other men try hopelessly to reach the windows, he caught the princess looking down at him. He knew then that she was the one for him. With a burst of energy, he took a running leap and his fingers caught the windowsill. Smiling, the princess shouted that her husband had been found…

What became of the doomed prince? Nobody knows. The ending of the original story was accidentally destroyed, so what happens to him is a mystery.

MORTALS

Not all of the characters in Egyptian myths were divine. Some of the stories that have survived to today tell the tales of ordinary, and extraordinary, Egyptian men and women.

These people may or may not have really existed, but the events of their lives still meant something very real to the ancient Egyptians. There were good examples to follow and cautionary tales to heed.

TheShipwrecked Sailor

A young sailor was once traveling on a ship of one hundred and twenty men. One night, a terrible storm hit. Rain poured down and thunder clapped above.

The waves beneath the ship began to rise up and throw the vessel from side to side without mercy. There was nothing the crew could do to take back control. When a particularly large wave washed overhead, the young sailor was knocked out and carried away by its force.

The sailor awoke sometime later to discover himself stranded on a deserted island.

All alone, the sailor gathered all the branches he could find and made himself a fire. As he sat and warmed himself beside the flames, he heard a terrible crashing coming from the nearby trees. When he turned to look, he was shocked to see a gigantic golden snake

coming toward him. Before he could say or do anything, the snake had scooped him up in its mouth and carried him away.

However, the snake did not intend to eat the sailor. It took him to its own home and there spat him out.

"What brings you here, human?" the snake asked.

"There was a great storm, and I was stranded here by the sea," the sailor explained, beginning to cry.

"I understand your woe, for I too suffered a great loss," the snake told the sailor. "One evening, when I was away from home, a star fell from the sky. It burned the earth and took my family with it. But you shall see your family again, sailor, for in four months your boat will return and take you home to them. In the meantime, be brave, for I shall make sure you have all you need."

"How can I possibly thank you?" the sailor asked in shock.

"All I ask is that you hug your children tightly when you return," the snake replied.

The sailor nodded solemnly and, when the time came, he did just as the kind snake had asked.

Khunanup was a peasant. He had very little, but he lived a happy life with his wife and children. One day, he announced that he would be heading to the market.

The time had come to refill the family's stores with provisions for the coming year. Khunanup readied his bags and loaded them onto his donkey, then off he went.

On his journey, however, Khunanup encountered a man by the name of Nemtynakhte. This man immediately noticed Khunanup's donkey, which the peasant took great care of, and decided that he wanted it for himself.

Unlike Khunanup, Nemtynakhte was a rich man, and he was used to getting want he wanted.

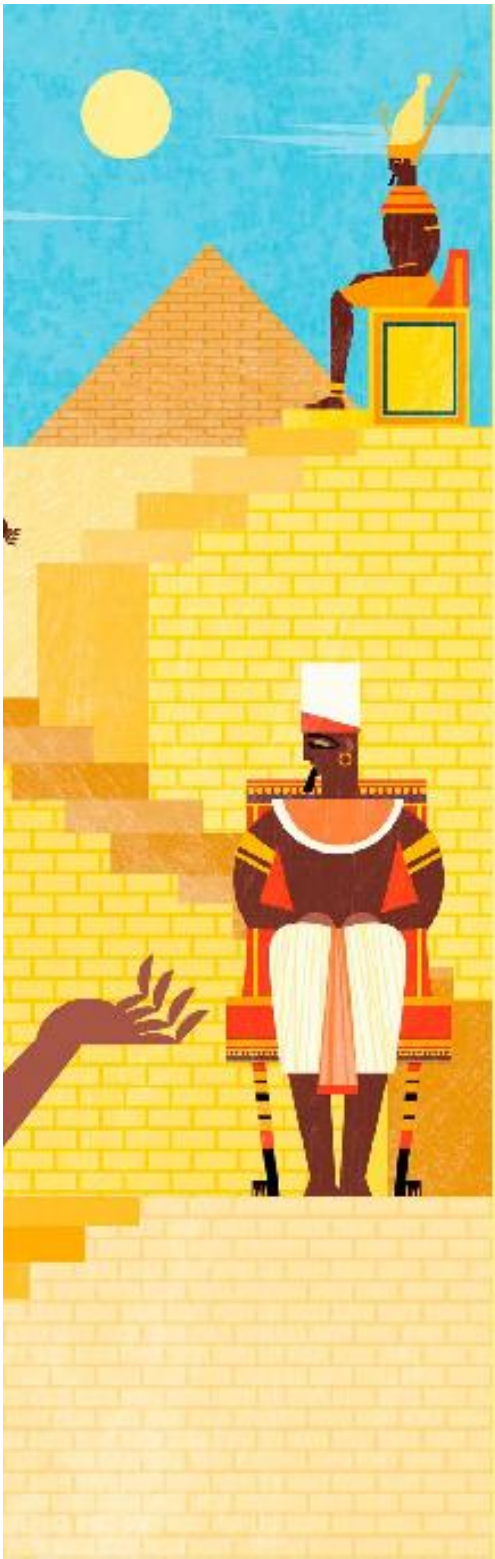
Nemtynakhte quickly came up with a plan that would allow him to take the donkey.

Khunanup was traveling along a path between the river and barley fields belonging to Nemtynakhte. It was a narrow path, and the rich man laid down a piece of cloth, hoping to obstruct Khunanup. When the peasant reached the cloth, Nemtynakhte called out to him to stop.

"Do not run your donkey over my cloth!" Nemtynakhte shouted.
"Apologies, sir," Khunanup called back. "I shall go around it."
So the peasant directed his donkey to the fields along the side of the path instead. Before he could travel far, however, the donkey decided to take a large bite out of the rich man's barley.
"Stop, peasant! I demand you give me your donkey as compensation for the grain he has eaten," Nemtynakhte said.
"Please, sir, surely I can pay you the cost of the barley instead, for I depend on my donkey," begged Khunanup.

However, Nemtynakhte simply laughed as he seized Khunanup's donkey from him.

The peasant was devastated at the rich man's actions, but he was not willing to give up so easily. He made his way to a nearby town to request a hearing with the chief steward Rensi, who oversaw the surrounding area.
Standing before the steward, Khunanup explained his situation through a tale about Ma'at, goddess



of justice. Rensi was so impressed by the peasant's well-worded, eloquent story that he went directly to the king to tell him about it.

"Do not grant him his request. For I wish to hear this man myself," the king instructed.

And so Rensi told the peasant there was nothing he could do. But Khunanup did not give up, and he returned the next day to speak again. This time his words were even more captivating than the day before. Everyone present listened intently, but Rensi was forced to deny him once more. Every time he was turned away, however, Khunanup returned, impressing everyone with the dignified way in which he spoke—including the king who listened in disguise.

Finally, the king decided the time had come to reward Khunanup for his dedication.

When the peasant next spoke, Rensi quickly hushed him. "Enough, Khunanup, the king has heard your appeal. Nemtynakhte has acted despicably and to teach him a lesson, all of his property will now be yours, including the stolen donkey."

And with that, the eloquent peasant was a peasant no more.

NEPHTHYS

GODDESS OF PROTECTION

Nephthys was a funeral goddess who escorted dead pharaohs to the underworld and protected them on their journey. She wept for them, just as she had wept for her brother Osiris when he joined the dead, thus setting an example for mourners.

KITE
Like her sister, Isis, Nephthys was often shown as a kite or with a kite's wings.

NIGHT BARQUE
Nephthys joined the deceased as they entered the underworld aboard the night barque.

HOUSE AND BASKET
This symbol was used to represent Nephthys and meant "lady of the mansion."

CANOPIC JARS
Nephthys was one of the gods who guarded the canopic jars containing a dead person's organs.

PARENTS

: Geb and Nut

CHILDREN

: Anubis

SACRED SYMBOLS

NEPHTHYS AND ISIS
Nephthys and her sister, Isis, were closely associated. Together, they were believed to watch over and protect the mummies of the dead, and they were often depicted side by side in scrolls and on wall paintings.

GODDESS

ANUBIS

GOD OF MUMMIFICATION

Anubis was the adopted son of Isis, and god of mummification and cemeteries. He was sometimes shown as a man with the head of a jackal, but when he guarded the dead it was in the form of a crouched jackal.

IMIUT
This was a stuffed animal skin used during funerals. Anubis was often seen with one.

WEIGHING SCALES
The weighing scales in the afterlife, used to weigh the hearts of the dead, were guarded by Anubis.

JACKAL
Anubis was usually depicted as a dog called a jackal, or was shown with a jackal's head.

TOMBS
Anubis was responsible for watching over and protecting the tombs of the dead.

PARENTS
: Osiris and Nephthys

CHILDREN
: Kebehwet

SACRED SYMBOLS

MUMMIFICATION
Anubis invented mummification when he first wrapped up his father, Osiris. He was believed to watch over the mummification of the dead, and priests wore jackal masks when mummifying bodies.

GOD

Truth and Falsehood

Two brothers named Truth and Falsehood lived and worked together. Truth had borrowed his brother's dagger, but when the time came to return it, he could not find it.

Truth realized quickly that he must have lost it, and he could not help but worry how his brother would react to this news. However, Truth was committed to honesty, so he confessed his mistake to Falsehood, apologizing profusely. Falsehood was not the forgiving type, though. He immediately flew into a rage, yelling at Truth for his carelessness.

Eventually, Falsehood summoned the gods themselves and demanded his brother be punished for his mistake.

"Truth has lost my finest dagger," he cried. "Its blade was made from the rock of Mount El and its handle was made from the trees of Coptos woods. It was larger and stronger than any dagger you've seen before. It cannot be replaced."

Truth was shocked by this description—the dagger had been no such thing! Before he could protest, however, the gods had acted on Falsehood's words and delivered a swift punishment: Truth was blinded in both eyes.

Aware of his deceit, Falsehood knew he could not let Truth live. "Take him to the desert," he told his servants once the gods had departed, "and feed him to the lions." The servants obediently led Truth away, but when they reached the desert, Truth begged, "Please leave me here! Do not take me to the lions." Truth had always been kinder to the servants than Falsehood, so they took pity and left him where he was.

Truth was sitting alone beside a tree, despairing of his misfortune, when a young woman stumbled upon him.

The lady was immediately taken by Truth's beauty and she invited him to come and live with her, to which Truth agreed. It did not take long for the two to fall in love and one day the young woman gave birth to a son. When the boy was old enough, he grew curious about his father's blindness, asking him how it had come to pass. With a heavy heart, Truth told his son the tale of his brother's betrayal.

The young boy was appalled by Truth's story and decided he would take it upon himself to avenge his father. The next day, the boy fetched the most impressive bull he could find and set out with it to Falsehood's home. When he arrived, he spotted a herdsman caring for Falsehood's cattle and asked if the man could keep an eye on the bull for just a few hours.
The herdsman agreed and off the boy went.

Later, when
Falsehood came to check on his cattle, he immediately noticed the beautiful new bull. "I wish to have that bull for my dinner," he told the herdsman.

"But sir, this is not your bull, I am watching it for a young boy," the herdsman replied.

"Never mind that," Falsehood commanded. "I will give him one of my own bulls in exchange." And so the herdsman conceded.
When the boy returned and found his bull gone, he demanded justice for his missing property.
"Take one of my bulls instead," offered Falsehood.
"None are as fine as my own bull was," said the boy. "He was as large as Egypt itself! Let's see what the gods have to say about this."

The boy called to
the gods, who came down to
judge his case. When they heard him
describe the bull's size, however, they laughed
in his face. "No bull can be as a large as Egypt,"
they chuckled.
"Yet you punished my father, Truth, when my uncle
exaggerated greatly the quality of his dagger," the boy replied.

"This boy is a liar. He cannot be the son of Truth because Truth is dead," cried Falsehood.

"I am not a liar, and I shall prove it!" the boy replied. He led
Falsehood and the gods to his home where his father sat, alive
and well.
"You misled us, Falsehood," the gods declared. "You too
shall lose your sight and from this day serve your
brother to make up for what you have done."
And that is how truth won over falsehood.

ABOUT THE MYTHS

From pharaohs to farmers, religion affected the way the ancient Egyptians lived their daily lives. References to gods and goddesses can be found throughout the buildings, objects, and scrolls the Egyptians created. Nowhere is mythology and magic more noticeable than in the tombs of the pharaohs, which were often decorated with colorful images of the gods. Studying them has allowed ancient historians to understand Egyptian myths much better.

Hieroglyphs are small pictures that represent sounds or whole words. There were no hieroglyphs for vowels. These hieroglyphs spell the pharaoh Tutankhamun's name.

Hieratic was a form of joined-up writing developed in Egypt more than four thousand years ago. It was used to write everything from letters to lists.

Some of the most detailed writing from Egypt has been preserved on scrolls of rolled-up papyrus—a paper made from the papyrus reeds that grow beside the Nile.

DISCOVERING THE MYTHS

The pharaohs were considered to be gods themselves, so ancient Egyptian mythology was impossible to separate from everyday life. Many of the myths are recorded in writing and artwork, which still survive today, allowing us to learn all about them.

THE ROSETTA STONE

The inscription on this stone from around 200 BCE contains the same message in hieroglyphs, demotic, and ancient Greek. It was rediscovered in 1799, and allowed hieroglyphs to be translated for the first time in 1822.

WRITING

The ancient Egyptians used three different alphabets: hieratic, demotic, and the hieroglyphic alphabet. Hieroglyphs were most often used to write on public monuments and tombs, while the other alphabets were used for day-to-day writing.

Large statues of the gods were placed at temples dedicated to them. Figurines of the gods were often buried with the dead because they were thought to protect the deceased on their journey to the underworld. The walls of tombs were often ornately painted with scenes of the afterlife. Everything from farming to the gods was shown. Practical items were sometimes shaped like gods, such as jars used for medicinal purposes in the form of Bes, the god of childbirth.

ART

A lot of the art that survives from ancient Egypt comes from tombs and monuments, and shows scenes from Egyptian mythology. These images tell us how the Egyptians imagined their gods.

THE ENNEAD

The Ennead was a group of nine gods—usually Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys—who were worshipped at the city of Heliopolis. Nine was a sacred number to the Egyptians.

HORUS

GODS AND GODDESSES

The ancient Egyptians worshipped a great number of gods and goddesses. Each varied in importance to different groups of people depending on time and place. Over the thousands of years of Egyptian history, several gods were even merged together. For example, some Egyptians considered Ra and Atum to be one and the same.

HATHOR
SHU
GEB
ATUM
TEFNUT
NUT

TRANSFER OF POWER

While the gods ruled, many of them lived on Earth. After thousands of years, however, they decided to hand over Egypt to humankind and moved instead to the sky or underworld.

ANUBIS
RA
MA'AT
THOTH
ISIS
SET
NEPHTHYS
OSIRIS

TEMPLES TO THE PHARAOHS

Given their godly status, the pharaohs, too, had temples dedicated to them. Often these were built by the pharaohs themselves and became a place to honor them once they had died.

FAMOUS PHARAOHS

Thanks to the many items left behind by the Egyptians, we know the names of a great number of pharaohs. In the more than 3,500-year history of ancient Egypt, there were around 170 pharaohs.

PHARAOHS

The kings and queens of ancient Egypt were known as pharaohs, and they were in charge of both the land of Egypt and its religion. The ancient Egyptians considered pharaohs to be divine beings, just like the gods, and this was what gave them their power.

Khufu was responsible for commissioning the largest of the pyramids at Giza.

Hatshepsut was the second ever woman to become pharaoh. She had many monuments built.

KHUFU

RULED 2589–2566 BCE

HATSHEPSUT

RULED 1473–1458 BCE

END OF EGYPT

Egypt was conquered by the king of Macedon, Alexander the Great, in 332 BCE. One of his generals, Ptolemy, became pharaoh. Ptolemy kept the tradition of divine kings, and many Egyptian and Macedonian gods were merged. In 30 BCE, though, his descendant Cleopatra VII, the last true pharaoh of Egypt, was overthrown by the ancient Romans.

Akhenaten tried to change Egyptian religion and make the Aten, a form of Ra, the only god.

One of the youngest pharaohs, Tutankhamun took on the role at the age of just eight or nine.

Ramesses the Great built more monuments and buildings than any other pharaoh.

AKHENATEN

RULED 1352–1336 BCE

RAMESSES II

RULED 1279–1213 BCE

TUTANKHAMUN

RULED 1336–1327 BCE

Natron
Mummification
tools
Canopic jars were used to store
certain important organs.

REMOVING THE ORGANS

To preserve the body, the organs first needed to be taken out. Most organs were removed from a cut made in the side, but the brain was extracted through the nose.

DRYING THE BODY

The Egyptians used a special kind of salt, called natron, to remove water from the body and stop it from rotting. The body could be left covered in salt for up to forty days.

MUMMIFICATION

The Egyptians believed that every person had three spirits, known as the ka, ba, and akh. The ka represented life force, the ba personality, and the akh immortality. For all three to survive after death, it was believed that the body had to remain whole, so mummification was developed to help preserve it. However, only the wealthiest people were mummified—ordinary Egyptians were buried in the desert.

Bandage
Amulets are small objects thought to have magic powers.

WRAPPING UP THE BODY

The body was coated in oil to help preserve it, and then wrapped in linen bandages. Amulets were tucked inside the bandages to protect the deceased in the afterlife.

OPENING OF THE MOUTH CEREMONY

The opening of the mouth ceremony was performed to bring the body back to life in the underworld. It involved the face of the mummy or coffin being touched with special tools while sacred offerings were made.

PROTECTING THE MUMMY

The mummies of the richest Egyptians were finally placed into coffins carved to represent the person inside. These were decorated with spells and prayers to the gods. The coffin was then put into a larger rectangular box, called a sarcophagus.

VALLEY OF THE KINGS

Over time, pyramids became less popular and pharaohs were buried instead in underground tombs in the Valley of the Kings. This ravine lies between the cliffs to the west of the River Nile. The pharaohs' wives were buried in the nearby Valley of the Queens.

TOMBS

The Egyptians took great care with their dead. The pharaohs in particular were usually buried

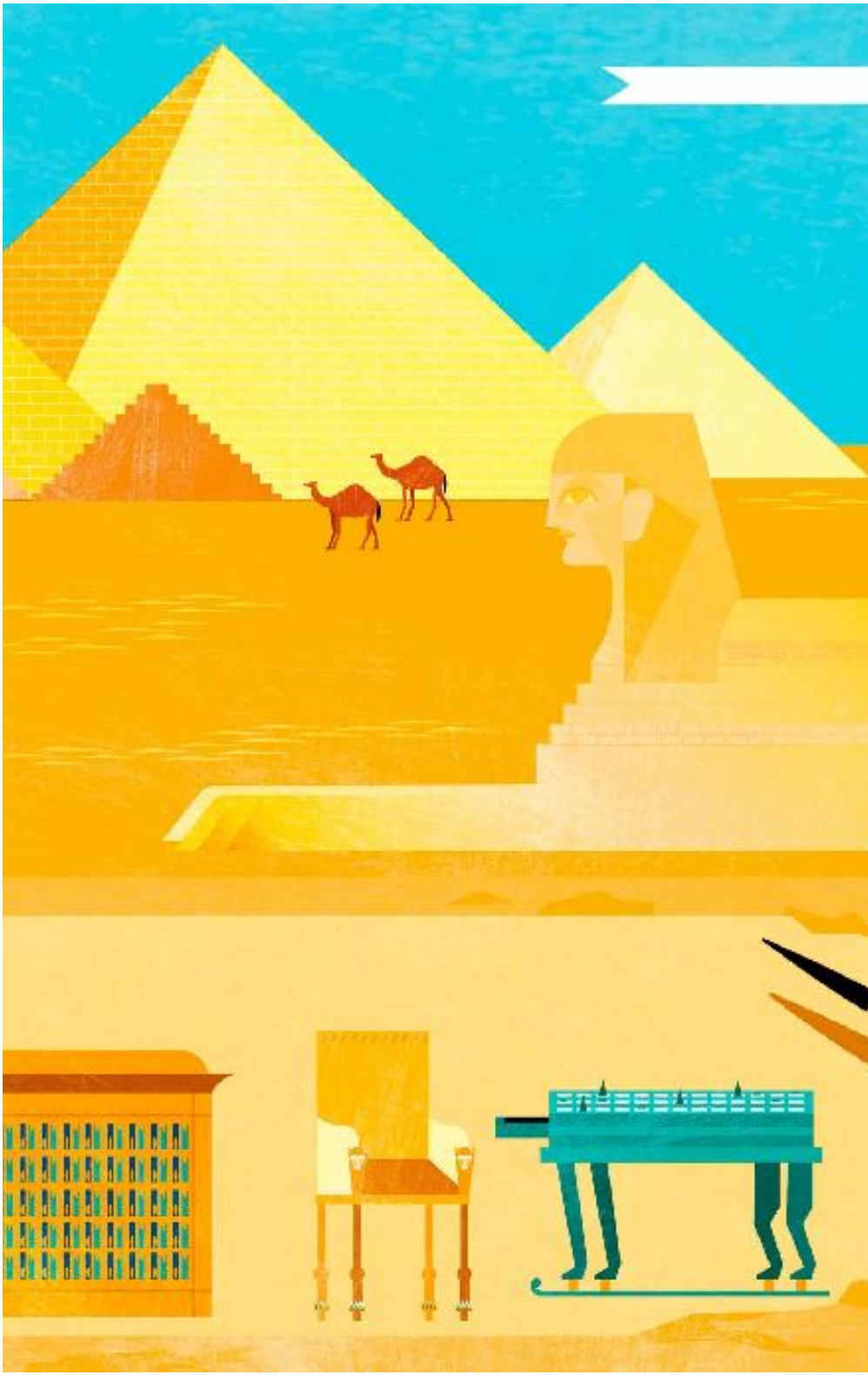
in grand tombs, which in later years were decorated with colorful paintings. They were also buried with hundreds of items the Egyptians believed a person might need in the afterlife—even statues of servants who would serve them after death.

Grave robbers often broke into tombs to steal the objects inside. Tutankhamun's tomb was raided twice, but there were still many objects inside when it was rediscovered in 1922.

The Pyramids of Giza were considered ancient even by the later ancient Egyptians. The largest was built for the pharaoh Khufu around 2600 BCE and is about as tall as eighty people.

Mastaba were flat-roofed tombs built from bricks of mud that were left to bake and harden in the heat of the sun. They were often used for nobles.

Tutankhamun's famous golden death mask was placed over his mummy. The mummy was contained in a series of increasingly large, highly decorated boxes.



PYRAMIDS

These enormous stone monuments were built to house a pharaoh after they died. The first pyramid in Egypt was built around 2650 BCE

for the pharaoh Djoser, but perhaps the most well-known pyramids are those built at Giza.
The sphinx is a huge statue next to the Pyramids of Giza. It has the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh.
A golden chair with lions carved into the arms was a throne for the pharaoh in the afterlife.
Tutankhamun was buried with multiple boards for the game of senet.
Among other weapons was an iron dagger—possibly made from a meteorite.

Apophis was a giant snake who guarded the fifth gate. He was the embodiment of chaos and the enemy of the gods.

If the heart was heavier than the feather, it was fed to the crocodile-headed demon, Ammit. Without their heart, the deceased could not enter the afterlife.

1. MUMMIFICATION

The Egyptians believed the body had to be preserved by mummification to allow the different parts of the person's spirit to survive. The ba spirit, or personality, was often shown with wings.

4. TWELVE GATES

There were twelve gates placed throughout Duat. Each gate was guarded by a different god or monster to test the deceased before they could travel any farther.

5. WEIGHING OF THE HEART

For the final test, the deceased's heart was placed on a set of scales with the feather of Ma'at. If the heart balanced the scales, the person was declared honest by Thoth and was allowed to progress.

JOURNEY OF THE DEAD

When a person passed away in Egypt, they were believed to begin a long and difficult journey through the underworld, also known as Duat. This journey involved various obstacles that the deceased had to overcome before they could reach their destination and rest in peace.

Osiris ruled over the dead in Duat and would sometimes assign them tasks, such as farming the fields. Some paintings show the mummified body traveling through Duat on the sun god Ra's boat.

6. AARU

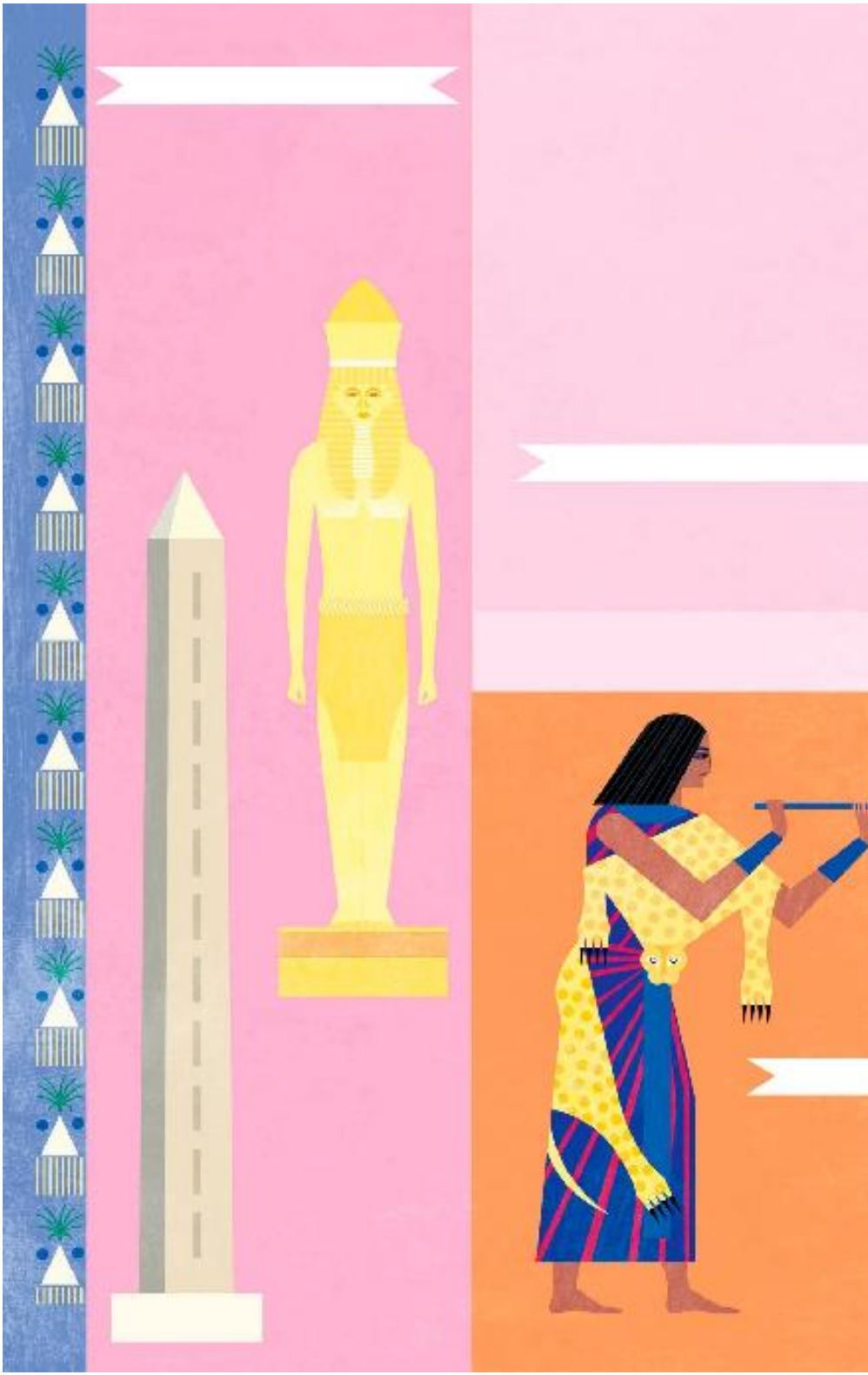
If the deceased was successful in their journey, they would eventually reach the endless fields of reeds known as Aaru. There, they could rest for eternity.

2. SOUL'S JOURNEY

The deceased set out on their journey armed with a selection of spells that had been buried with their body on scrolls. These were used to combat the dangers they would encounter.

3. NEGATIVE CONFESSIONS

Forty-two gods waited to pass judgment on the dead before allowing them to travel farther. The new arrival had to deny a list of various crimes to the gods if they were to continue.



CITY FAVORITES

In different cities, certain gods or goddesses were more important than others. Large temples dedicated to specific deities were often built, and the god or goddess was believed to watch over the residents.

PRIESTS

Priests and priestesses were in charge of the temples and oversaw worship. Each temple had a high priest who wore leopardskin robes.

TEMPLES

There were numerous temples across Egypt and they were usually dedicated to one god or goddess in particular, such as the temple to Isis in Philae.

WORSHIPPING THE GODS

Religion was a very important part of ancient Egyptian life. There were hundreds of Egyptian gods and goddesses. Over the centuries, different deities held varying levels of importance to different Egyptians, but the ways in which they were worshipped were similar.

Heliopolis, now found in the city of Cairo, was home to the temple of Ra-Atum. Today, there still stands a giant obelisk dedicated to the god.

In Memphis, Ptah was the main god. This city was the site of the great temple of Ptah, which contained many huge statues of the pharaoh Ramesses II.

SPELLS

The Egyptians often tried to use magic, even to solve everyday problems. There were spells for everything from curing a scorpion sting to easing the pain of childbirth.

RITUALS

Priests were responsible for performing important rituals in honor of the gods. Daily tasks included sprinkling holy water, decorating statues of the gods, and making offerings of food. They also ran ceremonies and festivals.

As the religious leader, the pharaoh was expected to perform certain rituals. After thirty years of rule, the pharaoh had to run a race in the Sed festival in order to renew his power.

Animals, including cats, dogs, fish, ibis, and even crocodiles, were also mummified. Most animal mummies were used as offerings to the gods.

Spells were often recorded on papyrus scrolls.

Magic wands were made from hippopotamus tusks.

LION

Lions were found in ancient Egypt but only the royal family were allowed to hunt them. They symbolized power, and fierce gods, such as Sekhmet, were shown with a lion's head.

SNAKE

Images of snakes, in particular the venomous cobra, were often seen decorating the pharaoh's crown. The danger snakes presented also made them a symbol of protection.

SCARAB BEETLE

These large, shiny beetles were often seen rolling balls of dung around, and came to be associated with the rising of the sun. The scarab was one of the sun god Ra's many forms.

IBIS

The sacred ibis was a bird that flocked to the Nile in large numbers each year during the annual flood. The Egyptians associated it with wisdom and the god Thoth.

HIPPOPOTAMUS

Hippos lived in the Nile and were considered symbols of strength and rebirth. Because of this, pregnant women would wear hippo-shaped amulets for good luck.

CATTLE

Many Egyptians depended on cattle for their livelihood. They were bred for food and to pull ploughs. The goddess of joy, Hathor, was often shown as a cow, or with a cow's ears and horns.

SACRED ANIMALS

The Egyptians respected the animal kingdom and how closely linked their lives were to nature. Many of their gods were depicted as part-human, part-animal, or sometimes had the entire form of an animal. Egyptian religion reflected the importance of animals in daily life.

CROCODILE

Crocodiles occupied parts of the Nile and posed a significant danger to life. Egyptians mummified crocodiles as offerings to the gods for protection against their snapping jaws.

BABOON

The ancient Egyptians had great respect for the baboon. They believed it to be a wise and serious animal that also worshipped the sun god as they did.

RAM

In some myths, the ram-headed god Khnum was thought to have made humans from clay. The Egyptians bred sheep for their meat, and woolen clothing was rare.

JACKAL

Wild dogs called jackals lived on the edges of the desert. They were often seen in cemeteries and were associated with Anubis, the god of death.

CAT

Cats were kept as pets in Egypt, just like today. Since they were skilled at catching snakes, they were considered good luck. The goddess of protection, Bastet, had a cat's head.

FALCON

Falcons were associated with the gods and royalty. Pharaohs were often shown in Egyptian art with the head of a falcon, to associate them with the god of kings, Horus.

AGI

AKHENATEN

ANKH

ANUBIS

APOPHIS

ASHTEBHYT

ASSYRA

ATEF

ATUM

BA

BARQUE

BASTET

CANOPIC

CLEOPATRA

COPTICS

DEMOTIC

DJED

DJEDI

DJED-SNEFRU

DJOSER

DUAT

EDFU

EL

ELEPHANTINE

ENNEAD

GEB

GIZA

HARDJEDEF

HATHOR

HATSHEPSUT

HEKET

HELIOPOLIS

HIERATIC

HIEROGLYPH

HORUS

IMHOT

ISIS

KA

KHEPR

KHNUM

KHONSU

KHUFU

MAAT

MATTA

MEMPH

MENAT

MERCH

AKH

AKH

AK
AKHENATEN

AKHENATEN

ak-eh-NA-ten

(Also known as

Amenhotep)
ANKH

ANKH

ANK
ANUBIS

ANUBIS

a-NOO-bis
APOPHIS

APOPHIS

a-PO-fiss

(Also known as

Apep)
ASHTESHYT

ASHTESHYT

ash-TESH-it
ASSYRIA

ASSYRIA

a-SIH-ree-ah
ATEF

ATEF

A-tef
ATUM

ATUM

A-toom
BA

BA

BAR
BARQUE

BARQUE

BARK
BASTET

BASTET

BA-stet

(Also known as

Bast)
CANOPIC

CANOPIC

ka-NOH-pik
CLEOPATRA

CLEOPATRA

klee-oh-PA-tra
COPTOS

COPTOS

KOP-toss
DEMOTIC

DEMOTIC

deh-MO-tik
DJED

DJED

JED
DJEDI

DJEDI

JED-ee
DJED-SNEFRU

DJED-SNEFRU

JED SNEH-fuh-roo
DJOSER

DJOSER

JOH-ser
DUAT

DUAT

DOO-at

(Also known as

Tuat)
EDFU

EDFU

ED-foo
EL
EL
ELL
ELEPHANTINE

ELEPHANTINE

ell-eh-FAN-teen
ENNEAD

ENNEAD

eh-NEE-ad
GEB

GEB

GEB
GIZA

GIZA

GEE-za
HARDJEDEF

HARDJEDEF

har-JEH-def
HATHOR

HATHOR

HA-thor
HATSHEPSUT

HATSHEPSUT

hat-SHEP-soot
HEKET

HEKET

HEH-ket
HELIOPOLIS

HELIOPOLIS

hee-lee-O-poh-liss
HIERATIC

HIERATIC

hai-RA-tik
HIEROGLPYH

HIEROGLPYH

HAI-roh-gliff
HORUS

HORUS

HOR-uss
IMIUT

IMIUT

IH-mee-ut
ISIS

ISIS

AI-siss
KA

KA

KAR
KHEPRI

KHEPRI

KEH-pree
KHNUM

KHNUM

K-noom
KHONSU

KHONSU

KON-soo
KHUFU

KHUFU

KOO-foo
KHUNANUP

KHUNANUP

koo-NA-noop
MA'AT

MA'AT

MAAT
MASTABA

MASTABA

MAST-a-ba
MEMPHIS

MEMPHIS

MEM-fiss
MENAT

MENAT

MEH-nat
MESKHENET

MESKHENET

mess-KEH-net

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Hieroglyphs don't contain any vowels, so the pronunciation and spelling of Egyptian names vary depending on different translations. This is a guide to how they are often pronounced in English.

NACRON

NEMTYNAKHTE

NEMTYMY

NILE

NOMARCH

NUBA

NUN

NUT

OSIRIS

PAPYRUS

PEDICHONS

PHARAOH

PHILAE

PTOLEMY

RA

RAMESSES

RENEFET

RENE

REWUSER

ROSETTA

SARCOPHAGUS

SCARAB

SENUSE

SENET

SERPOT

SESHAT

SET

SKU

SITRUM

SPHINX

TEFNUT

THEBES

THOTH

TUTANK

TYET

URAEUS

WAS SC

WESNE

NATRON

NATRON

NAY-tron
NEMTYNAKHTE

NEMTYNAKHTE

nem-tee-NAK-tee
NEPHTHYS

NEPHTHYS

NEFF-thiss
NILE

NILE

NAI-ul
NOMARCH

NOMARCH

NOH-mark
NUBIA

NUBIA

NYOO-bee-a
NUN

NUN

NOON
NUT

NUT

NOOT
OSIRIS

OSIRIS

oh-SAI-riss
PAPYRUS

PAPYRUS

pa-PAI-russ
PEDIKHONS

PEDIKHONS

PED-ee-kons
PHARAOH

PHARAOH

FAIR-oh
PHILAE

PHILAE

FAI-lee
PTOLEMY

PTOLEMY

TO-leh-mee
RA
RA
RA

(Also known as Re)
RAMESSES

RAMESSES

RAM-eh-seez
REDJEDET
REDJEDET

REH-jeh-det
RENSI

RENSI

REN-see
REWOSER

REWOSER

REH-woss-er
ROSETAU

ROSETAU

ROSS-eh-tow
SARCOPHAGUS

SARCOPHAGUS

sar-KOFF-a-guss
SCARAB

SCARAB

SKA-rab
SEKHMET

SEKHMET

SEK-met
SENET

SENET

SEH-net
SERPOT

SERPOT

SER-pot
SESHAT

SESHAT

SESH-at
SET

SET

SET

(Also known as Seth)
SHU

SHU

SHOO
SISTRUM

SISTRUM

SISS-trum
SPHINX

SPHINX

SFINKS
TEFNUT

TEFNUT

TEFF-noot
THEBES

THEBES

THEEBS
THOTH

THOTH

THOTH
TUTANKHAMUN

TUTANKHAMUN

too-tan-KAH-moon
TYET

TYET

TEH-yet
URAEUS

URAEUS

yoo-RAY-uss
WAS SCEPTER

WAS SCEPTER

WAAS SEP-ter
WERNES

WERNES

WER-ness

AKH
one of the three parts

of the Egyptian soul along with
the ba and ka. It represented
immortality
ANKH
symbol meaning life,
which resembles a cross with

a teardrop-shaped head
ANUBIS
god of mummification,
who is often shown with the
head of a jackal
APOPHIS
Egyptian snake god
who embodied chaos
ASSYRIA
ancient empire in
Mesopotamia in western Asia.
The Assyrians and Egyptians
fought and traded
ATUM
first god to appear from
the nothingness of Nun, and
first god to father children
BA
one of the three parts of

the Egyptian soul along with
the akh and ka. It represented
personality
BARQUE
type of boat that Ra
sailed across the sky
BASTET
goddess of protection,
who is often shown with the
head of a cat
BENBEN STONE
first mound of
earth, which appeared from the
nothingness of Nun
CANOPIC JAR
jar used to store
the organs of a mummy. There
were four different jars to
contain the intestines, liver,
stomach, and lungs
CUBIT
unit of measurement
used by the Egyptians, roughly
the length of an adult forearm
DEMOTIC
alphabet used by
later ancient Egyptians
DJED
column symbol that
represents Osiris's backbone
DUAT

Egyptian name for the
underworld where the dead
lived
EDFU
city located on the
western bank of the River Nile
ELEPHANTINE
island on the
River Nile that was part of the
city of Aswan
ENNEAD
group of nine gods
and goddesses who were
related to each other, and were
worshipped in the city of
Heliopolis
GEB
god of the Earth. He was
the third king of Egypt
GIZA
ancient cemetery where
three giant pyramids were built
HATHOR
goddess of joy and
dance, who is often shown with
a cow's horns and ears
HEKET
goddess of fertility,
who is often shown with the
head of a frog
HELIOPOLIS
city located in
northern Egypt
HIERATIC
alphabet used by
early ancient Egyptians
HIEROGLYPHS
signs that

made up the hieroglyphic
alphabet. They were mainly
used on monuments and
important documents
HORUS THE ELDER
one form

of the god Horus, who is often
shown with the head of a
falcon. Also known as Heru-ur
HORUS THE YOUNGER
one
form of the god Horus, who is
often shown with the head of

a falcon. He was god of the sky
and pharaohs, and the sixth
king of Egypt
IMIUT
stuffed animal skin on

a stick, used during funerals

ISIS
goddess of life and magic
KA
one of the three parts of the Egyptian soul along with the akh and ba. It represented life force
KHEPRI
god who is often shown with the head of a scarab beetle. He is associated with Ra
KHNUM
god who is often shown with the head of a ram. In some myths he created humans from clay

GLOSSARY

KHONSU
god of the moon

MA'AT
goddess of truth and justice

MASTABA
rectangular tomb made out of mud bricks

MEMPHIS
city that was Egypt's capital after Egypt was unified as one country. The god Ptah was worshipped there as the creator of all life

MENAT
necklace that was held. Used by priestesses in the worship of Hathor

MESKHENET
goddess of childbirth. She breathed souls into newborn babies

NATRON
type of salt used in the embalming process

NEPHTHYS
goddess of protection

NILE
river which flows through the center of Egypt. It flooded each year, leaving behind fertile land

NOMARCH
appointed official in charge of running one part of Egypt

NUBIA
ancient region in Africa that bordered Egypt to the south

NUN
god and primordial ocean of nothingness from which the universe emerged

NUT
goddess of the sky. She contained the stars

OSIRIS
god of the dead and king of the underworld. He was the fourth king of Egypt

PAPYRUS
tall plant and the paper made from its stalks. It grows around the River Nile

PHARAOH
name for an ancient Egyptian king or queen

PHILAE
island on the River Nile

that had a temple to the gods

RA

god of the sun, who is often shown with the head of a falcon. He was the first king of Egypt

RED CROWN

tall, red crown worn by the rulers of Lower Egypt. Also known as a deshret

ROSETAU

region of the Egyptian underworld through which Ra travels each night

SARCOPHAGUS

carved stone box in which the dead were put to rest

SCARAB

large species of beetle sacred to the ancient Egyptians

SEKHMET

goddess of war, who is often shown with the head of a lioness. She is the warrior side of the goddess Hathor

SENET

popular ancient Egyptian board game similar to backgammon

SET

god of storms and disorder, who is often shown with the head of the Set animal. He was the fifth king of Egypt

SHU

god of air. He made up the atmosphere with his wife, Tefnut

SISTRUM

musical instrument made of metal that was shaken to produce sound

SPHINX

mythological creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human

TEFNUT

goddess of moisture. She made up the atmosphere with her husband, Shu

THEBES

city that was Egypt's capital in later years

THOTH

god of wisdom, who is often shown with the head of

an ibis. He was the seventh king of Egypt

TYET

ankh-like symbol meaning life. It was used to represent Isis

URAEUS

cobra symbol that was worn on the brow of a pharaoh

WAS SCEPTER

staff held by some of the gods as a symbol of their power

WERNES

river in the Egyptian underworld

WHITE CROWN

tall, white crown worn by the rulers of Upper Egypt. Also known as

a hedjet

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